CHICKENHAWK

screenplay by

John Carpenter

based on the books

"Chickenhawk"

by Robert Mason

and

"Nam"

by Mark Baker

FIRST DRAFT

1 BLACK SCREEN 1

SUPERIMPOSE:

CHICKENHAWK

HEAR the soundtrack from "FORT APACHE", a John Ford western: the rousing U.S. Cavalry theme ('Scottish Dance') played in a big, 1940's movie style.

NOW the black screen becomes newsreel footage of returning World War II veterans. Sailors disembark from their ships, G.I.s kiss their girlfriends, a huge ticker-tape parade and celebration in New York City -- a hero's welcome --

DISSOLVE TO:

2 THEATER SCREEN 2

"FORT APACHE" on a huge theater screen. John Wayne stands at a window, looking out, and on the windowpane is reflected a platoon of Cavalry soldiers on horseback riding off into the sunset.

3 INT. THEATER - DAY (1951) 3

JEFF McDONALD, 10, sits by himself, eating popcorn, watching "FORT APACHE". CAMERA MOVES IN on Jeff, riveted to the screen. He is a handsome, sandy-haired boy. The John Ford Cavalry MUSIC continues OVER.

4 EXT. 50'S SUBURBAN HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY (1951) 4

The 'Scottish Dance' from "FORT APACHE" continues as Jeff plays with ANOTHER BOY, also 10. Cowboys and Indians. Toy guns. Shooting at each other. Running. Hiding behind bushes.

Jeff takes aim at the boy and pulls the trigger of his toy rifle, making an EXPLOSION SOUND with his mouth. The boy ducks behind a swing set, hiding.

JEFF
You're dead!

BOY
No I'm not!

JEFF
You are so -- !

The boy gives Jeff 'the raspberry' and dashes across the yard toward a large tree. Jeff takes a bead with his toy rifle, his finger CLICKING away on the trigger, his mouth rolling off one GUNSHOT SOUND after another.

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED: 4

JEFF
You're dead!

BOY
Am not!

Jeff quickly yanks a toy grenade from his belt, pulls an imaginary pin with his teeth, and rolls the grenade along the ground toward the boy behind the tree.

JEFF
(shouts)
You're a big piece 'a shit!

Shocked, the boy steps out from behind the tree. The game has stopped. The boy doesn't see the grenade roll to a stop by his feet.

BOY
Jeff, I'm gonna tell my dad you called me a big piece 'a shit!

Jeff just stares at the boy, grinning.

JEFF
... seven, eight, nine, TEN!
(makes a huge explosion sound)
BALLOOMBOOOW!

Jeff points. The boy glances down and sees the grenade.

JEFF
(eyes twinkling)
Now you're a dead piece 'a shit.

CUT TO:

5 EXT. THEATER - NIGHT (RAIN) - 1954 5

We see a movie theater marquee. "THEM" and "SANDS OF IWO JIMA" are playing on a double bill. Rain pours down. We see a line of WHITE PATRONS paying at the main box office, and as CAMERA PANS OVER we see a separate straggle of BLACK PATRONS paying at another entrance.

6 THEATER SCREEN 6

A black-and-white newsreel, circa 1954. 'NEWS OF THE DAY' or something like it. Big, over-lush music. A headline comes on: 'Indochina Conflict Ends'. Then we see grainy newsreel footage of an old banana-shaped Sikorsky helicopter hovering over a group of French soldiers somewhere in a jungle.

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED: 6

NARRATOR
(big, dramatic George Putnam reading)
The Indochina conflict ends on May 8, 1954, as the French are defeated at Dien Bien Phu in northwestern Vietnam.

7 INT. THEATER BALCONY - NIGHT 7

The balcony, the black section of the theater. A couple PATRONS watch the movie while BLACK KIDS run absolutely amok. Racing up and down the aisles. Spit-balls flying. Wads of paper fired from rubber bands.

ROBERT MAZE, 13, black, crawls on his hands and knees down one of the aisles. He has a rubber band and several wads of paper in his hands. He stops. Looks ahead. Then behind him. The coast is clear. Slowly he peers up over the theater seat.

8 ROBERT'S POV 8

CAMERA IS FOCUSED on a BLACK PATRON sitting a few rows up, the theater screen a big blur around him. Robert's hands come up INTO FRAME, the rubber band pulled taut between his fingers, a big wad of paper ready to fly.

9 ROBERT 9

For a moment his eyes re-focus to the screen --

10 ROBERT'S POV 10

-- and CAMERA RE-FOCUSES from the patron to the screen, and we see a Sikorsky banana-chopper filling the entire screen, descending slowly in grainy black-and-white.

NARRATOR
The Geneva Agreement of 1954 is signed, dividing Vietnam into north and south along the 17th parallel. The Agreement calls for national elections in 1956 to settle once and for all the questions of reunification.

11 ROBERT 11

He's mesmerized by the sight of the helicopter. The words drone on meaninglessly. He's forgotten about his rubber band slingshot. As he stares, ANOTHER BLACK BOY rises up from the row behind and dumps an entire Coca-Cola over Robert's head. SCREAMING AND GIGGLING, Robert chases the boy up the aisle.

12 BLACK SCREEN 12

Silence. SUPERIMPOSE:

1966

The WHOP-WHOP-WHOP SOUND of a helicopter RISES --

CUT TO:

13 EXT. ARMY HELICOPTER SCHOOL - FORT WOLTERS, TX - DAY 13

ROBERT MAZE, now 25, wearing a full-dress uniform, duffel bag over his shoulder, comes to a stop in the hot Texas sunshine. His features are striking -- angular and handsome. He looks up, as the WHOP-WHOP-WHOP of the helicopter draws his attention.

14 ROBERT'S POV 14

A Kiowa, the army's version of a Jetranger, primarily a training helicopter, THUMPS by overhead. CAMERA FOLLOWS IT, PANNING DOWN to a large sign on a low, concrete building: 'WARRANT OFFICER CANDIDATES REPORT HERE'.

15 ROBERT 15

stares at the sign, trying to hold back his excitement a little bit. Other OFFICER CANDIDATES carrying their bags move past him. A ROARING CAR ENGINE and 'Love Is Like An Itchin' In My Heart' by the Supremes blaring loud over a car radio rises. Robert turns to look at:

16 A 1965 MUSTANG 16

carrying JEFF McDONALD, 25, and KAREN, his girlfriend, bombs through the main gates. CAMERA PANS UP TO A SIGN: 'FORT WOLTERS - U.S. PRIMARY HELICOPTER SCHOOL'.

17 THE MUSTANG 17

pulls to a stop in front of the same low concrete building. Jeff looks around, grinning, impressed. He wears an outrageous Hawaiian sports shirt and blue jeans. Karen is an absolute knockout, but very straight circa 1966.

JEFF
Hey, this is nice. Fort Dix had all those old green shacks right out of World War II. I think I'm gonna like this --

Looking around, Jeff's attention is drawn to SERGEANT MATLOCK, wearing a white helmet and bright armbands, walking quietly toward him. Jeff makes no attempt to turn down the Supremes.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED: 17

JEFF
Say, sergeant, where should I put my luggage?

Sergeant Matlock approaches the Mustang.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
Luggage?

JEFF
I have to check in before five and I need a place to change into my uniform --

SERGEANT MATLOCK
You're a candidate?

JEFF
That's right.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
What are you doing driving around here in civvies? You think you're some kinda tourist?

JEFF
No, sergeant --

SERGEANT MATLOCK
You get this thing over there in the lot. Now! You will carry your luggage back here, double time! Now git!

Jeff grins, floors the Mustang, SCREECHES away from the sergeant and smoothly slides into a parking spot. He shuts the Mustang down, then leans over and puts his arm around Karen, kissing her --

JEFF
This is gonna be a blast!

18 EXT. BARRACKS - NIGHT 18

A gathering of CANDIDATES just outside the barrack quarters. Some smoke cigarettes, some just stand in small groups, bull-shitting. 'His Latest Flame' by Elvis plays on a transistor radio. Jeff stands off by himself, leaning against a wall, smoking, sizing up -- Robert, who shakes hands with PETE TURNER, 22.

TURNER
Pete Turner --

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED: 18

ROBERT
Robert Maze.

TURNER
Where are you from?

ROBERT
Louisville.

TURNER
I'm from Atlanta. Play any ball in college?

ROBERT
I ran track. Boxed a little.

TURNER
So how'd you end up here?

ROBERT
This is all I've ever wanted to do.

TURNER
Helicopters?

ROBERT
After I graduated high school I got my private pilot's license. Fixed wing.
(smiles)
But fixed wing's not helicopters.

TURNER
(nodding)
Whole different ballgame --

ROBERT
I just wonder why they're giving us all this tough guy crap around here -- They're acting like this is basic training all over again.

TURNER
I guess they teach you how to fly the same way they teach you how to march and shoot.

ROBERT
Fine by me. As long as I get to fly, they can do it any way they want.

Jeff, having overheard all this, smiles to himself, casually flips his cigarettes away and strolls off past Robert and Turner.

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED: (2) 18

ROBERT
Who's that?

TURNER
Jeff McDonald. His old man's a colonel. Dwight McDonald. One of the founding fathers of the Air Cav.
(beat)
I hear father and son are both ass-holes.

19 INT. FLIGHT SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY 19

A classroom filled with about thirty or so CANDIDATES seated at desks. LARNELLE HARRIS, the flight instructor, a huge, imposing black man, stands at the front of the class. He scans the room. Jeff looks appropriately bored and cool. Robert sits a couple aisles away. Robert is also trying to look bored and cool. And so is Turner.

HARRIS
(droning, running the sentences together, having given this speech a million times)
Gentlemen. Welcome to Fort Wolters. This flight program is nine months long. Preflight training is designed to weed out any of you candidates who lack leadership potential. If you make it through preflight and you get to the flight line, maybe you will <u>begin</u> to learn now to fly a helicop-ter. In the meantime, we will try our best to weed you out for mistakes.

Harris smiles as he turns and draws a pyramid on the blackboard.

HARRIS
At the top of the pyramid here is the Air Force fighter pilot. He aims at puffs of smoke in the jungle, drops his shit, and bam, he's home. Total time in the air from takeoff to land-ing is one hour and twenty minutes. A hundred missions and he goes home.
(beat)
The smart pilots are in the Air Force.

Harris points to the bottom of the pyramid.

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED: 19

HARRIS
You gentlemen aspire to be down here, at the bottom of the pyramid. The helicopter pilot. He flies over a thousand missions. His regulations say four hours flying time a day. It's more like six to eight hours a day -- Heat and dirt and vibrations -- all that noise and crap whirlin' around above you -- The helicopter pilot is the nigger of aviation --

Harris' eyebrows shoot up in a theatrical, mock-horrified expression.

HARRIS
Oohh, what a terrible word that nice black flight instructor is using on me! 'Nigger'! Oohh, how can my nice black flight instructor Harris call me a 'nigger'?
(beat)
Since none of you are helicopter pilots yet, what you are is 'pre-niggers', and we will try to wash as many of your pre-nigger asses as we can.

20 EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY 20

The class has broken. Candidates mill around. Harris exits the building. Jeff catches up to him at the sidewalk --

JEFF
Sir -- warrant officer candidate Jeff McDonald --

HARRIS
I know who you are.

JEFF
Sir, I just want to say -- I don't expect any different treatment because of my father. I intend to be the best pilot you've ever had, sir, on my own.

HARRIS
Son, take your horseshit and get out of here.

JEFF
Sir?

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED: 20

HARRIS
Pull your nose out of my ass, boy --

Harris walks away, leaving Jeff stunned.

21 EXT. BARRACKS - DAY 21

The candidates are lined up. Standing stiffly. Motionlessly. At attention. Sergeant Matlock walks down the line, stopping at Jeff. He leans over and whispers in Jeff's ear:

SERGEANT MATLOCK
You'll never make it, candidate.

JEFF
Yes I will, sir.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
There is no way I'm going to <u>let</u> you make it.

22 EXT. EXERCISE FIELD - DAY 22

The candidates sprint around the field. Jeff and Robert hold their own in the middle of the group, but it's apparent that everyone is worn out. Turner drops back to the rear of the pack.

Jeff comes up alongside Robert. Neither of them look at each other, but they both put on the juice and move up to the front of the pack. They sprint for all they're worth. Hard. Pushing themselves.

JEFF
(enjoying himself)
This is all right!

Robert looks over at him, winded, incredulous.

JEFF
(just out for a stroll)
You don't like this?

ROBERT
(breathless)
Fuck a duck --

23 EXT. BARRACKS - DAY 23

Another formation. But now there are a few less candidates lined up, at attention. Sergeant Matlock stops at Robert, eyeballs him.

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED: 23

SERGEANT MATLOCK
What'd you do in college, boy? Learn to push a pencil?

ROBERT
Yes, sir.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
You like me, don't you?

ROBERT
Yes, sir.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
You're queer for me?

ROBERT
No, sir.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
Then you don't like me?

ROBERT
Yes, sir. No, sir.

24 EXT. EXERCISE FIELD - DAY 24

The candidates are finishing their calisthenics. Robert and Turner stride across the field, wrapping towels around their necks --

ROBERT
All this basic training shit doesn't mean anything -- Let's fly --

They pass Jeff who is still jogging around the field, putting in extra time --

TURNER
See you later, McDonald --

Jeff waves at him as he passes --

ROBERT
I thought you said he was an asshole.

TURNER
He's all right --

25 INT. FLIGHT SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY 25

Harris is teaching ground school, talking a mile-a-minute, non-stop. The candidates are fewer now. Jeff listens

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: 25

casually, glances over at Robert, who is writing away at top speed, furiously taking notes. Turner does the same.

HARRIS
-- pulling up the collective control increases the pitch angle of both main rotor blades at the same time, collectively, causing the helicopter to rise --

26 INT. ROBERT'S ROOM - NIGHT 26

Robert enters his barracks room, carrying an armful of books, a flight computer, a notebook. He stops short, seeing Jeff lying on the top bunk smoking a cigarette.

ROBERT
That's my bunk.

JEFF
I know.
(beat)
They moved me over here.

ROBERT
Where's my roommate?

JEFF
Gone. So's my roommate. I guess they figure we belong together.

ROBERT
(beat)
McKernan's gone?

JEFF
Gone.
(beat)
It works out great for you. Your new roommate's the best pilot in class.

A pause.

ROBERT
You're Jeff McDonald, right?

JEFF
That's right. And I don't intend to be gone.

ROBERT
Neither do I. So get out of my bunk.

27 EXT. EXERCISE FIELD - DAY 27

The candidates are doing push-ups. Jeff huffs and puffs up and down, glances over, sees --

Robert, down the line, struggling with his push-ups. Now Robert glances over, sees --

Jeff, aware that Robert is looking, doing vigorous one-handed push-ups, one after another, rapid-fire.

Robert smiles to himself, continues his struggle.

28 INT. HANGAR - DAY 28

Jeff, Robert, Turner, and now only 13 other candidates sit at gray tables, four to a table. Sergeant Matlock stands in front of them.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
Gentlemen, your instructor pilots.

The IPs walk into the hangar: six civilian instructor pilots, mythical beings wearing gray flight suits, a kind of mechanic's coverall with a crotch-to-neck zipper and a dozen pockets all over it. The IPs have something sticking out of each pocket, privileged by how sloppy they are. DEKE, a tall, dark-haired IP with a southern accent, steps to the front.

DEKE
Gentlemen. We're gonna take y'all on your orientation flight. You'll find your flight suits in those lockers over there.

The candidates bolt for the lockers with an unbelievable excitement.

29 EXT. FLIGHT LINE - DAY 29

The candidates and their IPs walk out of the hangar. The candidates, dressed in flight suits, bound along like children, the IPs coolly strolling. Jeff passes close to Robert and Turner.

JEFF
I figure I'll be flying in about an hour or so.

ROBERT
I figure a half hour.

JEFF
Six-pack says you don't.

30 EXT. TEN ACRE FIELD - DAY 30

A Kiowa training helicopter sits in a hover in the middle of the ten acre practice field. It is almost totally motionless, three to five feet above the ground, floating, gently rising and falling on an invisible sea.

31 INT. KIOWA - DAY 31

Deke has the controls and is hovering the helicopter. Jeff sits opposite, a set of dual-controls in front of him. They both wear headsets.

DEKE
Okay. See that tree out there?

Jeff looks.

32 JEFF'S POV - A TREE 32

at the edge of the practice field, floating almost motionlessly in the chin bubble.

33 INT. KIOWA 33

JEFF
Yes, sir.

DEKE
Well, I'm gonna take care of the rest of the controls, and all I want you to do is to keep this bird pointed in the direction of that tree. You got that?

JEFF
Yes, sir.

DEKE
Okay, you've got it.

34 FOOT PEDALS 34

Jeff's feet move onto the pedals in front of him.

35 EXT. KIOWA 35

The Kiowa starts swinging wildly back and forth, turning from side to side.

36 FOOT PEDALS 36

Jeff's feet move back and forth, pushing first one and then the other of the pedals, trying to hold the damn thing still.

37 JEFF'S POV 37

The tree swings suddenly one way, then the other.

38 INT. KIOWA 38

DEKE
You see the tree I'm talking about?

JEFF
Yes, sir.

DEKE
Well, try to keep it pointed that way, if you don't mind.

Jeff tries again, sweat beginning to drip from his forehead.

DEKE
Not bad.

JEFF
Thank you, sir.

DEKE
Now that you've got the pedals down nice and good like you do, maybe we ought to show you how the collective works.

JEFF
Okay, sir.

DEKE
What I'm gonna do is take all the controls --

39 DEKE'S FOOT PEDALS 39

Deke's feet take the pedals --

40 JEFF'S POV 40

-- and the tree comes to an immediate stop dead ahead.

41 INT. KIOWA 41

DEKE
-- and then let you try your luck with the collective. Just the collective. Try to keep us about three to five feet off the ground, okay?

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED: 41

JEFF
Yes, sir.

DEKE
You got it.

Jeff grabs the collective with his left hand.

JEFF
I got it.

42 EXT. KIOWA 42

The Kiowa suddenly lurches upward to eight feet, then suddenly right back down to about two feet!

43 THE COLLECTIVE 43

Jeff's hand, knuckles tight, color gone, pumps on the collective stick.

44 JEFF'S POV 44

of the tree and the field bobbing jerkily up and down.

45 EXT. KIOWA 45

yo-yoing three feet to eight feet, nine feet to two feet, two feet to seven feet --

46 INT. KIOWA 46

DEKE
That's real good.

JEFF
Thank you, sir.

DEKE
I've got it.

Deke takes the collective. The helicopter immediately stabilizes, and remains four feet above the ground. Jeff is starting to look defeated.

DEKE
The next control we're going to try is this here cyclic stick. You don't move this one much, see.

47 CYCLIC STICK 47

Deke's hand <u>is</u> moving, quite a bit.

48 INT. KIOWA 48

JEFF
It looks like it's moving a lot to me, sir.

DEKE
I didn't say it wasn't moving, I said you don't move it much. Try it for a while. You got it.

JEFF
I got it.

49 EXT. KIOWA 49

The ship begins drifting off to the left, then comes to a sudden, wavering halt, and begins drifting back to the right.

50 JEFF'S CYCLIC STICK 50

with Jeff's right hand, in a claw-like grip, white-knuckled, moving all over the place.

51 INT. KIOWA 51

The ship swings back and forth, like a pendulum.

DEKE
I would like it better if you kept the helicopter over one spot or another that we both know about, if you don't mind.

Jeff nods, continues to painfully, tensely battle the cyclic.

DEKE
Well, you got it now, ace.

JEFF
Thank you, sir.

DEKE
Next thing to do, now that you've got the cyclic down, is to let you try all the controls at once. Okay, you got it.

JEFF
I got it.

Jeff's feet move to the pedals and, along with his right hand on the cyclic, he grasps the collective with his left.

52 EXT. KIOWA 52

The ship goes absolutely berserk! It whirls and GRUMBLES in a variety of confusing directions, attitudes and altitudes.

53 JEFF 53

panicked.

54 JEFF'S PEDALS 54

His feet pumping like on a bicycle.

55 THE COLLECTIVE 55

Jeff's left hand yanks it up and down.

56 THE CYCLIC 56

Jeff's right hand sweeps around jerkily.

57 LONG SHOT - THE FIELD 57

The Kiowa lurches and ROARS and spins all over the field like one is holding a handful of reins and a runaway team of horses is heading for a cliff! It is on the verge of being completely out of control!

58 INT. KIOWA 58

DEKE
I got it.

Deke takes all the controls.

59 EXT. KIOWA 59

The ship suddenly and smoothly and elegantly stabilizes, and moves over to the spot from which it started.

60 JEFF'S POV 60

That tree is right back in front of them, stable again.

61 INT. KIOWA 61

Now Jeff looks <u>totally</u> defeated.

DEKE
Well, it's true what they say about you all right, ace.

(CONTINUED)

61 CONTINUED: 61

JEFF
(mouth dry, breathless)
What's that, sir?

DEKE
You're a natural.

JEFF
A natural? I was all over the field!

DEKE
Don't worry about it. We'll just keep practicing in smaller and smaller fields.

62 EXT. FLIGHT LINE 62

Candidates wait impatiently for their turn as other candidates and their IPs return from the orientation flight. Jeff walks up, striding confidently. Robert and Turner move over to him.

ROBERT
How'd you do?

JEFF
(grinning)
Like a million. It's the greatest!

ROBERT
Yeah?

JEFF
There's really nothing to it.

63 EXT. KIOWA TRAINER 63

The same field. The same Kiowa trainer. Going ape shit. THWOPPING up and down, around, leaping one direction and then another.

64 INT. KIOWA 64

Robert struggles with the controls, wide-eyed, terrified.

65 EXT. FLIGHT LINE 65

Candidates and IPs return. Robert walks like a ruined man. Jeff finds him.

JEFF
So how'd you do?

(CONTINUED)

65 CONTINUED: 65

ROBERT
Dog breath --

JEFF
(grins)
Me too.

They both grin.

66 INT. BAR - NIGHT 66

Dark, smoky, neon-lit. 'I'm A Road Runner, Baby' by Junior Walker and the All Stars blasts from a jukebox. Jeff, Robert and other candidates sit at tables drinking enormous quantities of beer. Local TEXAS GIRLS stroll by, showing off for these would-be helicopter pilots who ogle them thoroughly.

ROBERT
When I was little, I used to dream -- about levitation -- I could float up off the ground -- only when no one was looking. When someone looked at me, I fell back down to the ground.

JEFF
(looks at him a beat)
You are a seriously troubled person.

ROBERT
You may think so. You may also shed a tear as I leave you far, far behind on my way up into the gleaming sky.

JEFF
Every man's allowed his dream, Maze.

ROBERT
My dream -- is to see one beautiful black woman walk in here tonight.

For a moment they glance around the bar, at the local girls on parade.

JEFF
I think you've definitely got a problem on your hands.

ROBERT
They must not grow any black people in Texas.

JEFF
Maybe in the big cities they do --

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED: 66

Turner wanders over to the table, carrying a beer bottle, weaving slightly, blitzed -- He leans down --

TURNER
There's a rumor goin' round that they close this place come one o'clock. Anybody'd do that's just as likely to rape your cat or scatter your garbage.

JEFF
Sit down, Turner --

TURNER
Can't -- Got a little Texas mama over here wantin' to know about helicopters.

Turner staggers off --

JEFF
Personally, now, I've been checkin' out that ten-footer over there --

ROBERT
(looks)
Damn, she's tall. Think she's that tall without those cowboy boots?

JEFF
God, I hope so --

ROBERT
(a beat)
You got somebody at home?

JEFF
No, not really. Nothing steady -- You?

ROBERT
No. Used to. But no way was she going to wait for a helicopter pilot on his way to Nam. She found out I owe the army three years over there for teaching me how to fly --

JEFF
That's the way it is --

ROBERT
So what do you think about Nam?

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED: (2) 66

JEFF
Please, I'm trying to get drunk here --

ROBERT
I know a little bit of history, from this book I read in college. 'Street Without Joy' --

JEFF
Look, Turner talked to this pilot who just came back. He says you can get a stereo in Saigon for a third of what it costs here. That's what I know about Nam -- it's a good place to buy a stereo --

ROBERT
Well, this book says Ho Chi Minh was sold out by the Americans. He was our ally, but we let a British colonel turn South Vietnam back to the French --

JEFF
(looking off)
I'm gettin' some eyeball action from that ten-footer --

ROBERT
The French were destroyed by the same people we're going against, but the reason the army thinks we can win is that the French didn't have helicopters. We're the official test.

Jeff gulps down what's left of his beer, leans over and whispers conspiratorily in Robert's ear --

JEFF
Nam's inevitable, Maze -- It's like the turning of the earth -- No matter what that book says, there's nothing we can do about it --

Jeff gets up from the table.

JEFF
So, like my old daddy says, we're born alone -- we die alone, but sometimes --
(gestures off with a smile)
-- there are good things in between.

He turns and walks away --

67 JEFF 67

now dancing suggestively with a six-foot-tall TEXAS BLONDE in cowboy boots and a cowboy hat. 'I'm A Road Runner, Baby' keeps blasting. Other candidates are up on the floor, swaying and gyrating drunkenly. Turner does a strange version of 'The Jerk' with a PRETTY, PETITE GIRL.

68 ROBERT 68

by himself at the table, drinking, watches.

CUT TO:

69 EXT. TEN ACRE FIELD - DAY 69

A Kiowa trainer glides down out of the sky, slows, flaring, comes to a hover, then gently makes a landing. CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal Deke holding a two-way radio, watching the Kiowa.

DEKE
(into two-way)
All right, shut her down.

Deke turns and walks off the field.

70 THE KIOWA 70

The rotors slow, stop. Jeff opens the door and steps out. He was alone in the ship. His first solo flight. Somehow he looks different. About ten feet tall. He really can't believe he's done it.

71 EXT. FLIGHT LINE 71

Jeff strolls up. Deke is smiling. Reaches out, shakes Jeff's hand. Robert, Turner and a few others watch.

DEKE
Congratulations on your first solo, ace.

JEFF
Thank you, sir.

Deke moves away. At which point Jeff goes nuts, jumping in the air, dancing around.

72 ROBERT 72

looks at Turner, both of them shaking their heads at the uncoolness of it all.

73 EXT. LAKE - DAY 73

As Robert, Turner and the seven remaining candidates lift Jeff aloft by his hands and legs and throw him YELLING and kicking, fully clothed, into the lake.

CUT TO:

74 INT. ELIMINATION BOARD - DAY 74

Robert sits on the edge of a chair. In front of the EIGHT MEMBER elimination board. A STENOGRAPHER's fingers move at a machine while a MAJOR speaks.

MAJOR
It says here that you failed to show enthusiasm in the leadership drills. Your instructor says you weren't interested in participating seriously when you were made student company commander.

Robert looks like a man on his way to the electric chair. He clears his throat.

ROBERT
Sir, that was three months ago. I was just out of basic training -- I'm very serious about getting through this school, but I might not have shown it sometimes.

There is absolutely no emotion from any of the board members.

ROBERT
I joined the army so I could fly helicopters. It's the only thing -- I've ever really wanted to do. I've studied for it, and I think my grades from ground school prove it. I really feel I've got a lot of ability --
(beat)
When I'm out there someday flying soldiers around, I expect to be one of the best pilots that ever came out of this school. Won't you give me another chance?

75 INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY 75

Robert sits all alone, a tiny figure in the room. Sergeant Matlock strides in. Robert jumps up to attention.

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED: 75

SERGEANT MATLOCK
Eyes front, candidate.

Robert's eyes snap to the front.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
It pains me to tell you, candidate, that the elimination board, in its infinite wisdom, has decided to reinstate your ass, over my violent objections. So get your lucky ass out of here --

Robert starts for the door, unable to suppress a grin.

SERGEANT MATLOCK
One more thing, candidate. The board's decision to reinstate you has ruined the student-to-instructor ratio at the flight line. So you will be starting preflight all over again with the next class. Maybe this time through I'll see you eliminated.

76 INT. ROBERT AND JEFF'S ROOM - DAY 76

Jeff is studying. Robert walks in. Jeff looks up expectantly. Robert gives him the thumbs up sign, and Jeff WHOOPS with joy and jumps up from his chair until Robert's grim expression stops him.

ROBERT
They put me back in preflight. Right back at the beginning --

They both stand there for a long beat.

77 EXT. EXERCISE FIELD - DAY 77

CAMERA TRACKS ALONG WITH flight instructor Harris. Jeff quickly catches up with him.

JEFF
Sir, may I talk to you about candidate Robert Maze -- ?

HARRIS
No, you may not, candidate McDonald --

Harris moves on. Jeff slows, stops --

CUT TO:

78 INT. BAR - NIGHT 78

Noise. Smoke. Jeff and Robert are well on their way to getting stinking, roaring drunk. Robert looks through the empty beer bottles on the table, searching for a full one. Finding none, he flashes "2" to the BARMAID.

JEFF
It was Matlock that tried to burn you --

ROBERT
Had to be --

JEFF
Matlock's not a pilot. You just didn't give a shit about the part of the training that matters to him --

ROBERT
Yeah --

WHAM! Turner passes out in a corner and slides down to the floor. Jeff and Robert both salute him as the barmaid brings over two more --

ROBERT
(takes a drink)
They let me stay, man -- Kicked my ass a little, first -- Just to make sure I was paying attention --
(beat)
It'll be all right -- I got preflight down cold -- And I'll be the best damn student commander they ever had --
(beat)
Guess it's just gonna take me a little longer, that's all --

Jeff reaches in his pocket, brings out a <u>wrapped deck of cards</u> with the Air Cavalry lightning bolt insignia on one side. He unwraps the cellophane.

JEFF
My daddy had these made up for the Air Cav --

He takes a card out of the deck. Tosses it over to Robert. It lands face up. Ace of spades.

JEFF
Ace of spades -- for the spade ace. Read the inscription.

Robert picks up the card, reads:

(CONTINUED)

78 CONTINUED: 78

ROBERT
'One day we will all stand together --
and together mount our thundering steeds --
for on that day, we shall finally know --
of life and death, of heartless deeds --
we will know of ourselves, each and
every one --
and we will fly together into the sun.'

Jeff tosses him the rest of the deck.

JEFF
You'd best believe it.

ROBERT
(looks at him)
And as you look off to your right --
that will be me, moving past you,
on my way to the very front of the
goddamn parade --

Jeff grins, lifts his best bottle in a toast --

JEFF
May you live to tell many, many,
many more lies --

Robert lifts his bottle.

ROBERT
May you never get the clap on
Sunday --

The bottles CLINK.

79 CLOSE ON JUKEBOX 79

as somebody punches a button. The first chords of 'Heat Wave' by Martha and the Vandellas blasts out.

80 ROBERT AND JEFF 80

now start YELLING over 'Heat Wave'. They both gulp deeply, jump up, begin dancing wildly, arms around each other, feet kicking like girls in a chorus line.

81 WIDE SHOT - THE BAR 81

Now other candidates join them until there is a line of drunken helicopter pilots, arms locked, feet kicking, dancing and SCREAMING.

82 INT. HANGAR - DAY 82

The next day. Jeff, Turner and the other candidates look horribly hung over. Pale and grim. They sit at tables, some of them with their heads in their hands. Robert is not among them.

DEKE
Some of you boys look like you want to puke. Must have been some kinda goat fuck goin' on last night. Y'all care to discuss it, or what?

No one says anything. Deke nods, steps over to --

A Huey helicopter parked in the hangar. A Bell HU-1 Iroquois, the ship every helicopter pilot lusts to fly. The Vietnam helicopter. Deke moves to the Huey.

DEKE
Let's take a look at this here Bell HU-1 Iroquois, known as the 'Huey'. She has a gas turbine engine, eleven hundred horsepower, forty-eight-foot rotor blades. Weighs five thousand pounds, plus you can load and lift four thousand five hundred pounds on top of that.
(grins)
This is the stuff, boys.

83 EXT. TEN ACRE FIELD - DAY 83

A Huey sits on the ground, rotors THUMPING, the ROAR deafening. The huge ship throbs with power, its downwash blowing flat the grass.

84 INT. HUEY - DAY 84

Jeff and Deke. The Huey cockpit is much bigger than the Kiowa. There's more instrumentation. Now Jeff and Deke are just sitting on the ground, full throttle, flat pitch. Jeff has the controls --

DEKE
Now, if you overload this baby, she will not hover, she will not leave the ground. But let's say you got men and equipment in the back, and you have got to go right now. You can try a running takeoff. Now, I'll follow through with you here --

Deke takes hold of his set of controls --

84 CONTINUED: 84

DEKE
Don't take it personally if I keep my hands on the controls while you do these maneuvers -- When you're out there in the real world, you need two pilots backin' each other up --

JEFF
Yes, sir --

DEKE
Okay, now -- You make her light on the skids with the collective --

Jeff raises the collective, slowly, gingerly.

DEKE
-- and then you mush her forward with the cyclic --

Jeff's hand inches the cyclic forward. Deke moves his controls in unison.

85 EXT. THE HUEY 85

begins to slide slowly across the grassy field.

86 INT. HUEY 86

DEKE
-- now she's sliding across the ground on her skids. Now, if you can slide her long enough, she'll pick up lift, and she'll take off like an airplane --

87 LOW ANGLE ON HUEY SKIDS 87

CAMERA IS MOUNTED on the skids, WIDE ANGLE. The skids bump and bounce along through the grass. Faster. Faster. Now the skids begin to rise, leaving the ground a few inches, then a foot, then two feet --

88 THE HUEY 88

slowly climbs into the sky. CAMERA PANS DOWN to a new class of preflight candidates jogging around the perimeter of the field, to Robert jogging out in front, ahead of the pack, staring longingly up into the sky at the Huey --

CUT TO:

89 CLOSE ON GLEAMING SILVER WINGS 89

glinting in the sunlight, pinned on an olive-green chest.

90 JEFF 90

in full-dress uniform, silver wings on his chest, standing at attention. His face is chiseled and proud -- a boy-man -- eyes alive.

91 A BRASS BAND 91

plays 'The Stars and Stripes Forever'.

92 EXT. EXERCISE FIELD - DAY 92

Jeff, Turner and nine other candidates, now warrant officers, now helicopter pilots, graduate. FRIENDS AND FAMILY sit in bleachers. Harris, Sergeant Matlock, the IPs, other OFFICERS look on.

93 ROBERT 93

sits in the bleachers too, looking on, in his uniform, subdued. It's not his day yet.

94 HARRIS 94

receives the candidates, one by one, shaking their hands. Turner first.

HARRIS
Congratulations, Warrant Officer Turner.

TURNER
Thank you, sir.

Now Jeff steps up.

HARRIS
Congratulations, Warrant Officer McDonald.

JEFF
Thank you, sir.

HARRIS
I'm glad to see you didn't have to have your daddy do it for you.

JEFF
Yes, sir.

CUT TO:

95 INT. ROBERT'S ROOM - DAY 95

Jeff is all packed. He and Robert stand looking at each other, still in their uniforms, saying goodbye --

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED: 95

JEFF
Well -- I'll see you, Maze.

ROBERT
Yes, you will. One fine morning you'll look up, I'll be passing you by --

They smile, at the unending competition.

JEFF
Don't embarrass me in the middle of Vietnam by passin' me by --

ROBERT
I'll try to hold back --

JEFF
I'd appreciate it --

Turner appears at the doorway, steps inside.

TURNER
Let's go --

Jeff picks up his bags as Turner shakes hands with Robert.

TURNER
See you, Maze --

ROBERT
See you --

Jeff looks at Robert.

JEFF
You take care of yourself.

ROBERT
I intend to.

Then Turner and Jeff walk out of the room, leaving Robert standing there, already missing Jeff.

96 BLACK SCREEN 96

Silence. Then HEAR the WHINE of an airplane. Also HEAR 'Reflections' by the Supremes, over a transistor radio. SUPERIMPOSE:

1967

CUT TO:

97 INT. TRANSPORT PLANE/EXT. AIRFIELD & BUNKER - NIGHT 97
(PANAGLIDE)

Jeff. Clean fatigues and boots. Duffel bag. Sitting in a jump seat of a WHINING, RUMBLING, bumping transport plane. Next to him is Turner. They're just sitting and waiting. Bull-shitting. 'Reflections' continues.

JEFF
I hear the 229th may get orders to go to Long Binh. Shit, Long Binh. That's huge. That's like L.A. That's safe. Long Binh hasn't been hit in who knows how long. There's 25,000 people there. What a great way to go through, just kick back --

TURNER
I bet you fifty dollars we're not going to Long Binh.

JEFF
Why?

TURNER
There's no way we're going to Long Binh. With my luck, man, there's just no way --

The transport plane bucks wildly for a couple seconds.

TURNER
Man, what a hunk 'a crap this thing is. I hear some of the guys out of Okinawa get to ride in on a 747. They got stewardesses, air conditioning -- You'd think they were going to Phoenix or something --

The PILOT'S VOICE comes CRACKLING over a PA system.

PILOT (V.O.)
All right, now they're taking some fire down at Bien Hoa. When we touch down, as soon as the doors open, everybody down low and run.

JEFF
What's this?

TURNER
Oh man --

The plane shudders violently.

(CONTINUED)

97 CONTINUED: 97

TURNER
I think we're coming in -- I can feel the plane going down --

All of a sudden the plane starts going nuts -- shaking and bouncing. Jeff and Turner hang on for their lives!

WHAM! The interior rocks up and down as the plane suddenly touches down. HEAR the tires WHINING on the airstrip.

JEFF
We're down --

PILOT (V.O.)
All right, everybody up.

CAMERA MOVES WITH Jeff and Turner as they stand up, both of them looking scared shitless. They get in line behind some other NEW TROOPS. Suddenly, the SOUND of the door CLACKING OPEN o.s. SOUND of GUNFIRE EXPLOSIONS outside --

PILOT (V.O.)
Welcome to Bien Hoa and we hope you boys have a good tour. Okay, now, come on, come on -- Move it, move it!

The line starts to move. CAMERA MOVES with Jeff and Turner --

TURNER
Oh, man --

JEFF
I just hope you don't start praying or something --

They quickly file up to the door, step through the threshold into -- Vietnam!

Darkness. A little airstrip, which is right now in the middle of a huge, artillery firefight! Magnesium flares pop up from everywhere. Horror fireworks. A couple wooden buildings are on fire. EXPLOSIONS hit! SOLDIERS are running, YELLING and SCREAMING. POP, POP, POP -- small-arms fire. Tracers coming in. Total chaos!

CAMERA MOVES BEHIND Jeff and Turner as they race for their lives, along with the other new arrivals, toward a large bunker --

MORE EXPLOSIONS! People SHOUTING. CAMERA SWEEPS ALONG behind Jeff and Turner as they enter the bunker --

(CONTINUED)

97 CONTINUED: (2) 97

Inside. Dark. Smoky. Jeff and Turner and the other new troops crouch down against a wall. White-blue light flashes in the windows like lightning bursts from the EXPLOSIONS outside! BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. The bunker shakes.

A BUNKER COMMANDER crouches nearby holding a two-way radio telephone --

BUNKER COMMANDER
(into two-way)
Arizona six-five, we're probing by fire. I want illumination here. We have heavy contact here!

A BOOM and the bunker shakes again, and all of a sudden the new troops are moving again -- CAMERA FOLLOWS Jeff and Turner down a narrow passageway into a second room -- when suddenly ANOTHER BLAST sends debris raining down on them. It sounds like it hit right on top of the bunker. Jeff pulls himself into the smallest-possible human shape on the floor --

JEFF
(whispers very quietly)
Please, God -- I promise I'll quit smoking and I will never touch a whore, not even a hand job -- and I will believe in you if you will only let me live through this --

ANOTHER BLAST, right on top of them!

JEFF
You don't believe me! Please, God, believe me! If you can, take me later!

For a moment or two, no more explosions. Jeff glances around.

JEFF
On the other hand, whatever you do is cool with me --

A LIEUTENANT runs into the bunker. His uniform is filthy, all ragged, his M-16 rifle dangling from a strap behind him. He has a kind of hard, cold look in his eyes. He crouches down with the new troops and rattles off a little foxhole speech at them with absolutely no excitement or urgency in his voice --

(CONTINUED)

97 CONTINUED: (3) 97

LIEUTENANT
Everybody here? Okay, you're in the Republic of South Vietnam. Now this is the program for the day -- If you don't do what I tell you, you're going to get killed in South Vietnam --

Jeff and Turner exchange glances --

TURNER
I think we're in big trouble --

LIEUTENANT
Now, all of you, follow me through the back here. Now let's go!

All of a sudden the lieutenant is running out a back door, and the new troops are following, and Jeff and Turner are following, out into the SCREAMING, EXPLODING NIGHT!

98 EXT. BUNKER/FIELD 98

Weird sulphurous light, from the magnesium flares overhead, makes the field, the Jeeps, the shacks, the running soldiers glow like in a psychedelic dream. A mist in the air is backlit by the earth-foaming EXPLOSIONS -- CAMERA FOLLOWS Jeff, Turner, the lieutenant, the others through a maze of shacks and vehicles and running, SCREAMING men --

99 MOVING SHOT 99

with Jeff and Turner and the new troops -- Suddenly the FRAME is engulfed in a BLAST OF FLAMES, and as CAMERA MOVES PAST now it's only Jeff running with the new troops -- Turner is gone --

100 MOVING SHOT 100

with Jeff, lit by the BLASTS around him, as he stops by a Jeep, looks back --

101 JEFF'S POV 101

across the magnesium-flare-lit landscape -- There's a body lying by a bomb crater, smouldering, blackened -- It could be Turner -- there's no way to tell --

102 JEFF 102

now looks around frantically for some sign of Turner --

JEFF
Turner!

(CONTINUED)

102 CONTINUED: 102

The lieutenant runs back, SHOUTING to some other men who have taken cover behind a mound of dirt --

LIEUTENANT
Come on, let's go, let's go!

The lieutenant sees Jeff start back toward the smouldering body, moves to him, practically drags him away --

LIEUTENANT
Move it, move it!

Now CAMERA FOLLOWS Jeff and the lieutenant as they race across the small field to several half-track trucks parked in a row.

103 EXT. REAR OF TRUCK 103

Most of the other new troops are aboard. CAMERA FOLLOWS Jeff and the lieutenant up into the back of a truck, as the truck pulls out, away from the firefight --

Jeff searches the troops' faces as EXPLOSIONS light up the scene --

JEFF
Turner!

Now Jeff looks out, over at another truck RUMBLING along next to them --

JEFF
Turner!

The NOISE of the firefight drowns him out -- Jeff is unglued. He stares back at the airfield --

LIEUTENANT
He a friend of yours?

JEFF
Yeah --

The lieutenant just nods. His expression doesn't change: no grief, no empathy, no sadness -- Just matter-of-factly --

LIEUTENANT
There's a world of hurt over here.

CUT TO:

104 CLOSE ON SILVER WINGS 104

pinned on a uniform, shining in the sunlight.

105 ROBERT 105

in full-dress, at attention, wearing his wings. It's finally his day.

106 EXT. EXERCISE FIELD - FORT WOLTERS, TEXAS - DAY 106

The brass band plays 'The Stars and Stripes Forever'. The bleachers are full. Harris and the other officers look on.

CUT TO:

107 A SWOLLEN, WHITE-HOT SUN 107

beats mercilessly down from the sky --

108 A SIGN 108

reads: 'CAM RANH BAY'.

109 ROBERT 109

in CLOSE-UP, squints, beads of sweat trickling down his forehead, moves AWAY FROM CAMERA, in his nice, new clean fatigues, carrying his flight bag, walking with a platoon of OTHER NEW TROOPS across an airfield --

110 EXT. CAM RANH BAY AIRSTRIP - DAY 110

Smoke drifts across the airstrip. Lots of smoke. Black, thick. A few wooden shacks line the perimeter. Hueys THUMP by overhead. CAMERA FOLLOWS Robert and JENNINGS, another newly-arrived helicopter pilot, through the smoke.

ROBERT
What's that smell?

JENNINGS
You got 200,000 men and no plumbing. So they're burning all the crap --

111 A LIEUTENANT 111

waits for the new troops by the side of the airstrip --

LIEUTENANT
All right, we got this here school bus to take you over to the compound --

The lieutenant falls in line and the group trudges on through the smoke --

LIEUTENANT
You guys got your salt yet?

(CONTINUED)

111 CONTINUED: 111

Nobody knows what he's talking about. The lieutenant produces a bag of salt tablets. He opens it, passes them out --

LIEUTENANT
Salt tablets. Take two a day. If you don't you'll get heatstroke. You need 'em to sweat --

The new troops grab handfuls as they trudge over to a large, olive-green school bus with wire mesh over all the windows.

112 INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY 112

The bus RUMBLES along through the billowing smoke. Robert and Jennings sit together. The lieutenant sits nearby.

ROBERT
(indicates the windows)
What's this wire for?

LIEUTENANT
It's the gooks, man, the gooks. The gooks'll throw grenades through the windows. See those gooks out there?

Robert and Jennings look --

113 POV 113

of TWO OLD VIETNAMESE MEN, shriveled little old men, squatting by the side of the road, conical hats, clothes that look like pajamas, filling sandbags. They glance up at the bus as it moves by, an ancient contempt in their eyes.

114 INT. SCHOOL BUS 114

ROBERT
(whispers to Jennings)
One of the largest military installations in the damn world, and we cover the windows to protect ourselves from little old men?

LIEUTENANT
(to Robert and Jennings)
You two the 'hill-a-copter' pilots?

ROBERT
Yeah --

(CONTINUED)

114 CONTINUED: 114

LIEUTENANT
Word is they're shippin' you up north. Place called the Golf Course. Some kinda big fugazi goin' on up there --
(smiles)
Y'all have a good time, now --

115 CLOSE-UP - JUNGLE FOLIAGE 115

Lush. Green. Water dripping --

116 A STAND OF TREES 116

A mist rises through the trees.

117 CLOSE - MUDDY, DIRT ROAD 117

as a Jeep tire SLUSHES through the mud --

118 EXT. DIRT ROAD - HIGH ANGLE - DAY 118

CAMERA LOOKS DOWN on the waffle-tracked, rutted road. The Jeep RUMBLES up, stops.

Robert gets out of the Jeep, followed by Jennings. They get their flight bags out of the rear. The Jeep pulls away as Robert and Jennings look up at --

119 A HUGE SIGN 119

rising up into the clear, blue sky. On it, hand-painted, is: 'GOLF COURSE'. CAMERA PANS DOWN to reveal a huge, sprawling fortified base camp deep in the jungle of Vietnam.

The Golf Course is a mess. Ditches, rutted dirt tracks, lots of confusion surround several wooden bunkers, shacks, tents and lean-tos. A command tower rises in the center of the camp. SOLDIERS stripped to the waist in the heat wander around. More jeeps arrive. NEW TROOPS pouring in --

120 ROBERT 120

and Jennings take it all in. Jennings points off to the right.

JENNINGS
Bob, look --

121 ROBERT'S POV - HUEY CITY 121

In a huge field opposite the camp is Huey City: row after row of Huey helicopters parked like giant bugs squatting on the ground.

122 CLOSER SHOTS 122

of the decals painted on the sides of the Hueys: 'THE HAND OF FATE', with an Eagle's claw gripping a lightning bolt --

'SCREAMING DOG', with the face of a snarling, werewolf-like dog, fangs bared --

'GOD'S HAMMER', with a fist holding a burning hammer --

'MOHAWK VENGEANCE', with an elaborately-done cartoon of an Indian screaming, holding a bow and arrow --

123 ROBERT 123

and Jennings begin to walk, under the Golf Course sign, through the main gates, into the camp --

CAMERA MOVES WITH THEM. Robert and Jennings, in their fresh, new uniforms, carrying their flight bags, striding along, staring at --

124 MOVING POV 124

SOLDIERS lying in and around tents, some sleeping, some smoking marijuana, some drinking beer --

125 MOVING POV 125

A SOLDIER by his tent, his face painted in green and brown psychedelic camouflage, slowly and gracefully moving through various karate stances, a slow-motion, mime ballet --

126 MOVING POV 126

past a bunker. 'Under My Thumb' by the Rolling Stones plays inside on a radio. A SOLDIER literally covered with bandoliers filled with bullets stands outside, staring back -- He wears two swords at his sides, a cutlass and a saber. He carries a shotgun and wears dark sunglasses and a helmet.

127 MOVING POV 127

past some tents. In a field behind them, a touch football game is underway.

128 MOVING POV 128

of THREE BLACK MUSLIM SOLDIERS, dressed in their turban-like headgear, sunglasses -- One of them gives the right-handed power salute. They stroll by the guard tower, and CAMERA PANS UP to a sign hanging down, reading: 'MESS WITH THE BEST, DIE LIKE THE REST', painted in red, dripping-blood style.

129 MOVING POV 129

of a crumbling wooden building, with a hand-lettered sign: 'COCKTAILS'. A stuffed dummy hangs by the neck from a large beam above the door. TWO OLD VIETNAMESE WOMEN stand at the door, emptying water from buckets.

130 ROBERT 130

and Jennings move through it. Up to an operations tent generally in the center of things. The tent is twenty by forty feet and looks dirty and rotted. CAPTAIN OWENS, the operations officer, emerges from the tent. His olive-drab T-shirt is dark from sweat. He pulls off his dark-stained cap and yanks the bottom of his T-shirt up to his face. Sweat drips out of his hair and beads across his beard stubble.

OWENS
Welcome to the Golf Course. I got no place for you to sleep now. You have to set up pup tents --
(beat)
That's all. There'll be a briefing in the morning --

ROBERT
So how is it around here?

Owens glances at them, wipes more sweat off his face with his T-shirt.

OWENS
Very confused. Every night there's a firefight on the perimeter. Mostly our grunts shooting at our own patrols coming back in --
(points)
Up there, last night -- five guys were killed trying to get back in. My advice to you is not to walk around in camp perimeter at night.

ROBERT
What exactly are the perimeters?

(CONTINUED)

130 CONTINUED: 130

OWENS
Well, there's no physical line -- The boundaries aren't clear. Sometimes the grunts shoot at anything that moves. Couple nights ago they put a hundred rounds into a water buffalo.

HEAR the LOUD THUMPING of a Huey coming in. They look up, see --

131 POV 131

of a Huey ROARING IN over the camp, on a short final approach.

132 HIGH ANGLE - MOVING SHOT 132

on Robert, as he watches --

133 CLOSE ON SIDE OF HUEY 133

A painted decal: 'CHICKENHAWK'. Beside the word is drawn a cartoon chickenhawk running away, a save-ass dash, but its face is turned and snarling, ferocious, beak open --

134 CLOSE ON PILOT 134

as Chickenhawk swings by -- It is Jeff. In a helmet. A cigarette in his mouth. Just a brief flash of him as the ship passes.

135 ROBERT 135

ROBERT
Hey, Jeff --
(back to the other two)
I know that guy --

136 ROBERT'S POV 136

Chickenhawk makes a landing next to a large, generally well-kept-up wooden building. The hospital. SEVERAL MEDICS wait for the ship to land, then dash toward the rear compartment, bent over, struggling through the tremendous rotor downwash, and lift a WOUNDED SOLDIER on a litter from the helicopter.

137 CLOSER 137

on JANE, a nurse, in her mid-twenties, dark hair, well-scrubbed good looks, helps with the litter --

138 CHICKENHAWK 138

as the medics move away, lifts off again, makes a pedal turn, swings back over the camp, disappearing behind trees in the distance.

139 ROBERT 139

watches it go --

OWENS
You know McDonald?

ROBERT
Yeah. We went to flight school together.

OWENS
He's makin' Medivac runs today. Maybe you'll catch him tonight.

CUT TO:

140 THE SUN 140

sliding down behind the horizon.

141 EXT. PUP TENTS - DUSK 141

Robert and Jennings sit by their pup tents, eating C rations out of a tray. The Golf Course parade continues around them: SOLDIERS wandering about, campfires burning, frisbees flying. Both Robert and Jennings look fairly disgusted by their meal as one of the BLACK MUSLIMs from earlier, still wearing his head gear, strolls by. He stops and gives Robert the power salute.

BLACK MUSLIM
Hey, brother --

ROBERT
Hey --

BLACK MUSLIM
(watches them eat)
You know how to stop the runs? You eat the peanut butter in them C rations.
(pats his stomach)
Stops anything that moves. Now -- you drink the grape juice, you shit your brains out. 'Tween the peanut butter'n the grape juice, you regular.

(CONTINUED)

141 CONTINUED: 141

ROBERT
(puts down his tray)
Thanks --

BLACK MUSLIM
(indicates pup tents)
You sleepin' in there tonight?

ROBERT
Yeah.

BLACK MUSLIM
All right, when you go to bed, take your blanket and tuck six inches under your feet. Then tuck it tight all the way up to your chest. Put your weapon on your chest, take the top of the blanket and flip it over your head. Like a cocoon.

JENNINGS
Why?

BLACK MUSLIM
We have rats -- eat any cat back in the States -- You haven't seen rats till you seen these rats --

JENNINGS
Hell, man, I've seen rats, man. We've got rats in Chicago that kill dogs.

BLACK MUSLIM
Yeah -- but you haven't seen rats till you seen these rats --

The Black Muslim moves along. As he's out of earshot --

JENNINGS
(a sneer)
Right --

Robert glances around the camp.

ROBERT
I'm gonna check on my friend. You want to come -- ?

JENNINGS
Later --

Robert gets up, walks away --

142 TRACKING SHOT WITH ROBERT 142

as he walks along through the camp. The waning sunlight has somewhat subdued the activity. Meals are being eaten, beers popped, cigarettes smoked --

143 MOVING SHOT 143

FOLLOWS Robert as he walks toward the bar -- A lot more activity going on inside --

144 INT. BAR - DUSK 144

Robert enters. A tin-roofed building. Kerosene lamps. Smoke and NOISE. There is one huge party going on -- 'The Letter' by the Box Tops comes over four transistor radios simultaneously. Troops are getting very drunk. TWO PILOTS arm wrestle on the floor. The two old Vietnamese women scurry around, cleaning up beer bottles, delivering beer bottles --

Robert notices something moving on the wall. A human skull mounted above the bar moves its jaw, CLACKING along with 'The Letter ("Give me a ticket for an airplane -- Don't have time to catch a fast train"). SKY RING, another pilot, pulls the string that leads from the skull to the end of the bar --

Robert just stares at the skull, and doesn't notice Jane, the nurse, seated near him -- She notices Robert, however. Notices his nice, clean fatigues. Notices the rather stunned look on his face --

JANE
They boiled it.

ROBERT
(startled)
What?

JANE
That's how they got it so white. They built a fire out back, boiled it for a whole day -- to get the meat off. Then they bleached it. Used Clorox.

Robert looks back up at the skull, nods silently, then sits down quickly at an empty table across from Jane. There is a large glass jar on the table. Robert casually lifts the lid. The jar is filled with human ears. Robert drops the lid back on, quickly withdraws his hand -- Jane continues to watch him, somewhat amused --

(CONTINUED)

144 CONTINUED: 144

JANE
When did you get in?

ROBERT
Ah -- this afternoon --
(indicates the jar)
Are those real?

JANE
Let me buy you a drink.

Robert gets up from his table, moves over and sits down at her table. He looks a little shaken.

JANE
It takes a little getting used to around here --
(flashes "2" to the Vietnamese women)
Two beers --

Robert just can't take his eyes off that jar --

JANE
See, nobody sits at that table except rookies --

Robert reacts to 'rookies'.

JANE
And nobody touches the jar -- except rookies. But if someone around here happens to drop something in it, nobody watches.
(beat)
There's nothing in the jar. It's what you <u>think</u> is in it --

Robert simply stares at her, as if she might just be slightly crazy --

ROBERT
I'm, uh -- I'm looking for Jeff McDonald. He's a pilot. Do you know him?

145 EXT. BAR - NIGHT 145

The sun is down now -- just a little splash of light in the sky by the horizon. Campfires are burning all around the Golf Course. Things are quiet. Robert and Jane step out of the bar, carrying their beers. Jane points --

(CONTINUED)

145 CONTINUED: 145

JANE
Over there -- that's McDonald's hooch.

146 POV - JEFF'S HOOCH 146

Across camp, SEE a ramshackle lean-to in the midst of tents and bunkers and campfires.

147 ROBERT AND JANE 147

as TWO WHITE GRUNTS stroll by. They stop, stare at Robert and Jane --

WHITE GRUNT
This boy botherin' you at all?

Robert reacts, his face tightening -- Jane is livid --

JANE
No, he's not, shitheel --

The two grunts don't move -- They don't care if Robert is bothering her or not --

WHITE GRUNT
Move along now, boy.

The other grunt jabs him with an elbow and they both LAUGH, walk away GIGGLING --

JANE
Shitheel!

ROBERT
You go on, now --

JANE
I'm sorry --

ROBERT
Maybe I'll wait for my friend --

The last of the sunlight fades on the horizon.

JANE
Well -- there goes the light. The sun goes down, I go hide -- I'll see you --

ROBERT
Thanks --

Robert watches her walk away.

148 EXT. JEFF'S HOOCH - NIGHT 148

Robert approaches Jeff's hooch. He leans down, glances inside. It's empty. Just an old air mattress propped up off the ground by a couple sandbags. Some blankets are gnarled around each other. Robert leans in a little closer, sees --

149 CLOSE - PHOTO 149

A small black-and-white photo on one side of a folded-out double frame. It is DWIGHT McDONALD, Jeff's father. CAMERA PANS OVER to the other side of the frame -- a card announcing a memorial service for Dwight McDonald -- 1919 - 1966.

150 ROBERT 150

looks at the frame for a beat, then reaches in his fatigues, comes out with the Air Cav deck of cards that Jeff gave him. He flips a card out, takes a pen out of his pocket --

151 CLOSE - PLAYING CARD 151

Next to the Ace of Spades, Robert writes: 'The spade ace is here'.

152 ROBERT 152

places the card carefully on top of the air mattress --

CUT TO:

153 INT. ROBERT'S PUP TENT - NIGHT 153

Robert lies on the ground in his pup tent. Still awake. He has not arranged the blanket as instructed by the Black Muslim. He stares --

154 ROBERT'S POV 154

through the open flap of the pup tent -- Darkness and drifting smoke outside. Occasionally there are distant muzzle flashes and the POP-POP-POP of small-arms fire.

155 ROBERT 155

His eyes close -- He falls asleep.

CUT TO:

156 ROBERT - LATER 156

Sound asleep. Same position. His blanket is half-on him. A huge, furry shape, CLOSE TO CAMERA, out of focus, moves up on Robert's chest, across his blanket.

157 EXTREME CLOSE-UP - ROBERT 157

His eyes slowly open. He looks up at --

158 ROBERT'S POV 158

A humongous, cat-sized rat, so big it looks like it's out of a cheap horror movie, stares back at him. Then its mouth opens. Baring yellowed teeth --

159 FULL SHOT 159

WHAM! Robert moves in five directions at once, scrambling, crawling, swinging, clawing his way out of the pup tent.

160 EXT. PUP TENT 160

Gets outside. Stands up. Looks back into the darkness of the pup tent. Scared shitless.

CUT TO:

161 EXT. PUP TENT - DAWN 161

Robert, asleep outside his pup tent, all wrapped in his blanket like a cocoon, as the Black Muslim had instructed, his .45 on his chest.

Feet move by him. SOUNDS of activity in the camp. Robert opens his eyes.

CUT TO:

162 EXT. OPERATIONS TENT - DAY 162

A map tripod is set up in front of the operations tent. MAJOR FIELDS, a hard-looking man in his forties, wears loosely fitted jungle fatigues, like a safari jacket. There is a casual air about him, as if he doesn't like getting into any more detail than he has to. Robert, Jennings and a THRONG of other pilots stand listening to the briefing. Each pilot wears fatigues, .45 in a hip holster, flak jackets and carries a pair of gloves and a helmet.

FIELDS
Okay -- we got some new arrivals here -- so this is what's happening --
(points to the map)
The Golf Course is here, two miles north of Route 19 -- This whole area is considered VC territory and the idea is to clean Charlie out.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

162 CONTINUED: 162

FIELDS (CONT'D)
(points to a spot higher up)
Now Fort Apache is up here about 50 clicks. It's a Special Forces Camp, and it's your refueling stop --
(points to a spot in between Fort Apache and the Golf Course)
Now here's the LZ. We're taking ARVN (pronounced: "Arvin") in here and it's supposed to be pretty hot. That's all --

The gathering breaks. Robert looks around for Jeff.

FIELDS
Any of you just in-country?

ROBERTS
(indicates Jennings and himself)
We are.

FIELDS
Okay, we'll need to split you up --
(smiles)
We'll try to ease you into it --

A HELMETED PILOT steps CLOSE TO CAMERA, behind Robert. We don't see his face.

HELMETED PILOT
You're with me --

Robert turns around. Underneath the visor of the helmet is a familiar smile. Jeff.

ROBERT
Jeff!

163 JEFF AND ROBERT 163

Jeff lifts the visor of his helmet. He's grinning at Robert, happy to see him, but there's something different about Jeff's eyes. They aren't smiling. They're the eyes of an older man.

JEFF
It works out great for you. You're with the best pilot in town --

(CONTINUED)

163 CONTINUED: 163

ROBERT
Man -- How are you, man?

Jeff reaches in his flight suit and pulls out a cigarette. Lights it.

JEFF
I'm here.

There is an awkward moment. Jeff, puffing away on his smoke, Robert standing there, wanting to embrace Jeff or something -- unable to -- unable to think of anything to say right now --

JEFF
Come on, we gotta get going --

They start to walk, CAMERA MOVING WITH THEM away from the operations tent, through the camp. PILOTS and TROOPS bustle around them -- Lots of activity and excitement in the air --

ROBERT
I went looking for you last night --

JEFF
Sometimes I'm hard to find --

Jeff stops at a tent, reaches in, grabs <u>two magnum shot-guns</u>, tosses one to Robert --

ROBERT
They're illegal, aren't they?

JEFF
I know -- but we have about three dozen of 'em -- You'd better take one --

They start walking again, CAMERA MOVING WITH THEM --

ROBERT
Why?

JEFF
We're carrying ARVN. South Vietnamese army regulars --

ROBERT
They're on our side, aren't they?

(CONTINUED)

163 CONTINUED: (2) 163

JEFF
They're supposed to be. But we've had a couple ARVN turn around and shoot back into the ship that just dropped them off --

Jeff tosses his cigarette away, immediately lights another --

ROBERT
So how is it -- really?

JEFF
It's like pissing in the wind --

164 EXT. HUEY CITY - DAY 164

CONTINUE TO MOVE WITH Jeff and Robert as they walk through Huey City, down the rows of parked helicopters. CREW CHIEFS are scurrying around their ships, going through their preflight inspections. PILOTS move to the cockpits. DOOR GUNNERS load ammunition.

Jeff and Robert pass Flight Leader MORRIS, 30, tall, blond-haired --

MORRIS
Mount up, boys! Let's mount up!

Finally they arrive at Chickenhawk, move over to the CREW CHIEF, a lanky, dark-haired 32-year-old who is squatted down next to the ship, draining the fuel for the first flight of the morning --

JEFF
This is your crew chief. Crew, this is Maze --

Crew looks up. A neutral expression.

ROBERT
Hi.

CREW
Top of the morning.

Jeff moves on, Robert following -- to CURTIS, a black door gunner, seated by his M-60 machine gun in the rear compartment. Curtis is 21. A young, boyish face.

JEFF
Curtis. Door gunner -- This is Maze --

(CONTINUED)

164 CONTINUED: 164

CURTIS
Peace and love, brother --
Can I take your picture?

Now Robert notices a small camera dangling around Curtis' neck. Robert strikes a pose, smiles, and Curtis SNAPS off a shot --

JEFF
And that's Lon over there --

Jeff indicates LON, the second door gunner, seated on the other side of the rear compartment. Lon's face is covered with a furry beard, his hair starting to fall down over his ears. Lon nods hello to Robert, Robert nods to Lon --

CURTIS
We call him Lon -- for Lon Chaney, Junior -- 'cause he look like the Wolfman -- Smell like the wolfman too --

Lon nods vigorously, grinning -- Robert steps back, points to three rocket tubes on the skids --

ROBERT
I've never seen those before --

JEFF
Crew rigged them up, on both sides. Tied them into the electrical system. They're 2.5-inch rockets. Basic American ingenuity --

Jeff moves to the cockpit, Robert following --

JEFF
You want to fly right seat today?

Robert's reaction: excitement and apprehension --

ROBERT
Yeah -- ! You sure?

JEFF
(quietly)
Got to get you into this war, sooner or later --

165 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - DAY 165

Jeff and Robert get in. Jeff on the left, Robert the right. They face the morning sun. Both put on their sunglasses. Jeff folds his hands across his flak vest.

(CONTINUED)

165 CONTINUED: 165

JEFF
Okay. Start your cockpit check.

Robert begins his check, running through the various levers, buttons, gauges, his fingers lightly touching across the instrumentation.

JEFF
All right, now when you're done, watch Morris up there in that lead ship. He's the flight leader. Watch for his signal.

Robert leans out of the cockpit.

166 ROBERT'S POV 166

of the lead ship, several rows ahead. SEE Morris lean out of the cockpit, whirling his hand as the crank-up signal.

167 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 167

Robert leans back in. Puts his hands on the collective starter.

JEFF
Let's light a fire.

Robert shoves in the starter. The starter WHINES and the rotors start moving slowly. Then the turbine catches with a ROARING WHOOSH --

168 EXT. HUEY CITY 168

All around rotors begin turning, turbines catch, a HUGE ROARING SOUND begins building as the helicopters start up.

169 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 169

The rotors blur overhead. Jeff and Robert connect their helmets to the radio cords. Robert flips more switches. From now on they talk through the ship's intercom --

JEFF
Check 'em in back.

Robert depresses the intercom button on his cyclic.

ROBERT
Crew chief, door gunners -- ready?

170 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT - CURTIS 170

CLICKS TWICE on his intercom button.

171 CREW 171

CREW
Ready --

172 LON 172

CLICKS TWICE.

173 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 173

JEFF
Have 'em check the doors.

ROBERT
(nods, CLICKS on his intercom)
Are the door pins in place?

174 CREW 174

checks the pins that hold the two sliding doors open --

CREW
That's a Roger --

175 EXT. HUEY CITY 175

All the Hueys are turning now. The ROAR is utterly DEAFENING. Dust and debris are kicked up everywhere. The ships bump and vibrate gently on the ground, waiting. HEAR the pilots calling a ready with their color call signs --

YELLOW ONE (V.O.)
Yellow One --

YELLOW TWO (V.O.)
Yellow Two --

YELLOW THREE (V.O.)
Yellow Three --

YELLOW FOUR (V.O.)
Yellow Four --

176 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 176

Jeff and Robert, waiting --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange One --

ORANGE TWO (V.O.)
Orange Two --

(CONTINUED)

176 CONTINUED: 176

ORANGE THREE (V.O.)
Orange Three --

Jeff CLICKS his radio switch --

JEFF
Orange Four.

The call signs continue, through WHITE and RED -- as Jeff looks at Robert.

JEFF
Here comes ARVN --

177 EXT. HUEY CITY 177

The ARVN troopers, bristling with bandoliers of ammunition, M-16 rifles, M-79 grenade launchers, hand grenades, canteens, come dashing down the rows to their assigned helicopters, bounding into the rear compartments --

178 ROBERT 178

turns around in his seat, sees --

179 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 179

-- three ARVN squeeze between Crew and Curtis on the long bench across the cargo deck, three more ARVN climb on the deck in front of them by Lon, and four more crouch in the pockets. TEN ARVN. Looking very reluctant, apprehensive.

180 EXT. HUEY CITY 180

The Hueys all REV UP to full throttle. It's like a SCREAMING hurricane.

RED FOUR (V.O.)
Red four -- Sixteen slicks loaded.

MORRIS (V.O.)
That's a Roger. Let us ascend.
Yellow Team, lift off --

The first four Hueys in line simultaneously pick up off the ground, rotors WHAPPING madly, a dust storm around each of them -- simultaneously they nose forward, in formation, start to move, CAMERA PANNING WITH THEM. They sweep majestically across the ground, starting to rise, gaining altitude to get over the line ahead of them --

181 POV FROM CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 181

of the Yellow Team rising into the sky --

182 JEFF AND ROBERT 182

watching -- OVER the headphones --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange Team lift off --

Jeff's arms remain folded across his flak jacket.

JEFF
You got it.

ROBERT
I got it.

183 COLLECTIVE 183

Robert's hand pulls up the collective --

184 PEDALS 184

Robert's feet begin to slowly pump the pedals, anticipating the lift off --

185 CYCLIC 185

Robert's hand, anticipating, moving the cyclic gently --

186 ROBERT 186

Fear and excitement! Eyeballs moving. Chickenhawk begins to lift off --

187 JEFF 187

smiling --

188 EXT. HUEY CITY 188

The second four Hueys, the Orange Team, lift off amid their own swirling storm. They nose over, start to pick up speed -- one of them, Orange Four, Chickenhawk, a little shakier than the others.

189 ROBERT 189

as Chickenhawk picks up speed now, the Golf Course sliding past out the side window --

190 THE ORANGE TEAM 190

of Hueys, gliding along in formation, rising --

191 JEFF 191

JEFF
Keep her at sixty till we get over the treeline --

192 ROBERT 192

nods, looks out ahead --

193 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 193

The treeline moves closer and closer -- Above and ahead, in the distance, SEE the Yellow Team, four whirling dots against the sky --

194 THE ORANGE TEAM 194

rises, dark and ROARING, over the treeline --

195 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 195

Jeff looks over at Robert --

JEFF
Nothin' to it --

ROBERT
(grinning, adrenaline pumping)
Sure --

CUT TO:

196 EXT. VIETNAM COUNTRYSIDE - DAY 196

SEE all 16 Hueys, Yellow through Red Teams, flying through the sky, about 1000 feet off the ground --

197 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 197

Jeff and Robert, THUMPING along -- Jeff points out the front windshield --

JEFF
Down there, four o'clock --
An Khe --

198 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 198

Down below, nestled in the trees beside a large expanse of rice paddles, is a small village --

199 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 199

Robert stares hard at something on the ground --

ROBERT
Man with a gun! Over there --
northeast corner --

Jeff looks --

200 CURTIS 200

quickly swings his machine gun down into ready position --

201 JEFF 201

JEFF
Hold it! It's Two-Shot Charlie --

202 EXT. HOOCH - DAY 202

On the ground, TWO-SHOT CHARLIE, an old Vietnamese man from a run-down hooch in the background, drags a huge 100-year-old blunderbuss across a small field, to two wooden stakes. He strains, lifting the ancient weapon up onto the stakes -- and takes aim at the helicopters flying over in the distance. He cocks the two hammers - KABLOOM! One chamber fires!

203 POV FROM CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 203

A dot on the ground, Two-Shot Charlie lets go with the other chamber -- A puff of smoke appears at the end of the blunderbuss --

204 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 204

JEFF
Two-Shot Charlie -- doing his bit for Ho Chi Minh. Shoots at the Americans as they fly over every day. Wave at him, now --

Jeff waves vigorously. Robert waves, a little confused --

205 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 205

Crew and Curtis wave down --

206 EXT. HOOCH - DAY 206

Two-Shot Charlie squints up at the helicopters, then waves back -- then begins dismantling the muzzle-loaded flint-lock.

207 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 207

JEFF
We leave him alone. See, if we kill him, they might replace him with someone who can shoot --

208 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 208

Curtis CLICKS on the line.

(CONTINUED)

208 CONTINUED: 208

CURTIS
Two-Shot Charlie's okay -- He shoots and all of a sudden a cow falls down in the field --

209 LON 209

looking across the ARVN from the other side.

LON
'Bout like you --

210 CURTIS 210

CURTIS
Don't be puttin' me down, now -- I decide you be puttin' me down, I cause you all kinds of turmoil, you sittin' over there -- I'll turn loose our brand new pilot on you --

Curtis grins, gestures up front to Robert --

211 ROBERT 211

hears, reacts, feeling slightly stupid --

212 EXT. VIETNAM COUNTRYSIDE - DAY 212

The 16 Hueys glide along. In the distance, HEAR what seems to be THUNDER --

213 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 213

ROBERT
What's that sound?

JEFF
Gunships prepping the LZ.

214 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 214

Way up ahead, past the Yellow Team, SEE smoke rising from a clearing in the jungle, SEE occasional EXPLOSIONS pluming up, and SEE six small dots circling in an orbit above the clearing.

215 JEFF AND ROBERT 215

MORRIS (V.O.)
Okay, Yellow Team -- start your run --

(CONTINUED)

215 CONTINUED: 215

JEFF
Ease her back -- about 80 knots --
so we don't bump into Yellow Team --

Robert drops the collective, eases back on the cyclic.

216 EXT. LZ - LONG-LENS SHOT - DAY 216

A LONG LENS COMPRESSES the scene -- It is dreamlike, almost a slow-motion ballet -- SEE the gunships, 2 Hueys, circling lazily above the LZ, their flex guns and rockets streaming down into the jungle below. They POUND the living hell out of the treeline and the foliage. Just above them, SEE 2 Kiowa Jetrangers and 2 Hughes 500 Observer Loches -- Drifting around, in an orbit, like moths around a flame -- And in the background, SEE Yellow Team slowly gliding down into the LZ. The LZ itself is an open clearing around which is ringed the BLASTING, spraying EXPLOSIONS --

217 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - ROBERT 217

staring.

218 JEFF 218

staring.

219 CURTIS 219

slides back the bolt of his M-60 machine gun.

220 LON 220

does the same --

221 THE ARVN TROOPS 221

looking scared --

222 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 222

300 feet up, a quarter-mile away from the LZ -- The Huey gunships POUND the jungle with FIRE. The Yellow Team slowly descends --

MORRIS (V.O.)
Yellow Team on short final --
Fire at will --

SEE the door gunners on the Yellow Team ships OPEN FIRE --

223 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 223

Jeff puts his hands and feet on the controls along with Robert.

JEFF
Okay, I'm with you --

ROBERT
Okay --

MORRIS (V.O.)
Preacher Gun-Six, Yellow Team is inbound -- Throw smoke --

224 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 224

Chickenhawk and the Orange Team are still a ways away. Plumes of red smoke suddenly billow up from the ground. As the Yellow Team approaches the LZ for a landing, the radio CHATTER intensifies.

YELLOW FOUR (V.O.)
Yellow Four, they're on the other side of that treeline --

MORRIS (V.O.)
Negative, Yellow Four, I see the smoke --

YELLOW FOUR (V.O.)
Negative, Yellow One, the target is upwind of that smoke!

225 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 225

Jeff and Robert, concentrating, listening --

YELLOW TWO (V.O.)
Yellow Two is taking heavy fire from the treeline!

YELLOW THREE (V.O.)
Yellow Three, receiving small-arms fire from the west!

PREACHER GUN-SIX (V.O.)
Yellow Team, this is Preacher Gun-Six. Pick your spots. The LZ is rough.

226 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 226

MORRIS (V.O.)
Yellow Team, flare!

(CONTINUED)

226 CONTINUED: 226

Ahead, the four Hueys of the Yellow Team all flare in unison, their noses rising up, slowing down, coming right down into the LZ --

227 EXT. LZ 227

as the Hueys land, as one of the ships, Yellow One, just off the ground in his landing flare, suddenly drops fast from 20 feet and lands hard!

YELLOW ONE (V.O.)
(excited, distortion)
This is Yellow One! Captain Morris is hit! Captain Morris is hit!

228 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 228

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange Team, make your approach.

Jeff and Robert, together on the controls, slow the ship, descending --

229 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 229

SEE the ARVN troops race out of the four Yellow Team Hueys, scrambling across the LZ, bounding toward the edge of the clearing, FIRING as they run --

YELLOW TWO (V.O.)
Yellow Team, lift off!

Three of the Yellow Team Hueys take off in unison, arcing up off the ground, into the air. Yellow One remains on the ground, its rotors turning --

230 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 230

JEFF
(into mike)
Yellow One's still on the ground!

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
That's a Roger -- Orange Team on short final -- Fire at will!

JEFF
Fire at will --

231 CURTIS 231

begins FIRING, moving acrobatically, BLASTING behind and underneath and ahead of the helicopter, spraying the area frantically in sweeping arcs --

232 LON 232

doing the same. Spent shells spew out of the machine gun.

233 ROBERT 233

as the machine guns OPEN UP out either side of Chickenhawk -- He flinches with the INCREDIBLE POPPING SOUND -- the guns are so close behind him it's like someone slapping his ears with open palms --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange Team, flare!

234 JEFF AND ROBERT 234

drop pitch, pull back the cyclic, in unison -- Chickenhawk rears back, nose up, slowing --

235 EXT. LZ 235

SEE the Orange Team flaring, descending, dropping down to the LZ. Above, the gunship Hueys circle, their rockets and machine guns ROARING down, blasting earth into the air.

236 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 236

as Chickenhawk lands, right behind the Yellow One Huey --

237 JEFF AND ROBERT 237

drop the collective all the way down, as they bump onto the ground --

238 EXT. LZ 238

The Yellow Team is down -- ARVN dash out of the ships, except for Chickenhawk --

239 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 239

CURTIS (V.O.)
ARVN ain't movin'!

Jeff and Robert turn around.

240 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 240

Crew tries to force an ARVN off -- The other ARVNs keep ducking their heads in the gunfire, waiting with wide-eyed anticipation for Chickenhawk to leave! There is no way that they want to run out into the hellfire outside!

241 JEFF 241

lifts his shotgun from beside his seat and points it back into the rear compartment, at ARVN.

JEFF
Get off! Get off!

242 ROBERT 242

watching. Suddenly, there is a hole in the Plexiglas windshield in front of him. TIK! A round, jagged hole! Then TIK-TIK-TIK! Three more holes! Bullet holes!

243 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 243

Crew draws a .45 and points it at an ARVN --

CREW
Get the fuck off!

The ARVN begin to climb off, racing away from Chickenhawk once their feet hit the ground --

244 EXT. LZ 244

The ARVN finally exit Chickenhawk, just as there is a series of HUGE, DIRT-SPEWING EXPLOSIONS all around the Orange Team!

245 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 245

The BLASTS are hitting all around!

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
We got mortars coming in here!

YELLOW ONE (V.O.)
Captain Morris is dead!

246 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 246

of Yellow One Huey directly in front. Smoke pours out of the ship --

YELLOW ONE (V.O.)
(continuing)
This ship is destroyed! We're getting out!

The PILOT of Yellow One jumps out, as does the CREW CHIEF and the TWO DOOR GUNNERS -- The crew chief has a .45, the pilot a shotgun --

247 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 247

JEFF
(into mike)
Orange Four, we'll pick 'em up!

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange Team, take off! Go, go, go!

248 EXT. LZ 248

Three of the Orange Team Hueys lift off, amid the mortar BLASTS! The crew from Yellow One races over to Chickenhawk, scrambling aboard --

249 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 249

Curtis and Lon BLASTING away out the doors, as the Yellow One crew get in and FIRE out with their weapons --

CREW
They're aboard, they're aboard!

250 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 250

Jeff and Robert pull in power --

JEFF
Orange Four is lifting --

251 EXT. LZ 251

as Chickenhawk lifts off, slides forward, around the Yellow One Huey in front of them --

252 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 252

passing Yellow One, still running, rotors turning lazily, smoke drifting out -- SEE the cockpit, and SEE Morris still sitting in the right seat with his head slumped forward on his chest --

253 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 253

Jeff and Robert stare at Morris, as Chickenhawk rises --

254 EXT. LZ 254

CAMERA FOLLOWS Chickenhawk up into the sky, as it turns slightly, passing the gunships --

255 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 255

Curtis and Lon sweep their machine guns in a ROARING arc --

256 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 256

as Chickenhawk climbs toward the forward treeline, higher, higher --

257 JEFF 257

noses the ship over slightly --

258 CYCLIC 258

as Jeff's thumb depresses a red button.

259 ROCKET TUBES 259

The rocket tubes on the skids ROAR, BELCHING smoke and fire!

260 EXT. TREELINE 260

as the rockets stream from Chickenhawk into the treeline, and the treeline EXPLODES in a napalm-like fury!

261 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 261

of the burning treeline, sliding down, as Chickenhawk climbs up into the sky --

262 JEFF AND ROBERT 262

flying, still buzzing with adrenaline, staring ahead --

263 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 263

Now Curtis and Lon stop firing -- They slump against the wall of the rear compartment, staring out the open doors --

Crew, stares -- The crew from Yellow One is silent --

264 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 264

Jeff and Robert. Silent.

ROBERT
Jesus --

Jeff lets go of his controls.

JEFF
You got it.

ROBERT
(quietly)
I got it.

265 EXT. FORT APACHE - FIRE BASE - DAY 265

A dirt hillock in the center of lush vegetation. A sign rises in the center: 'FORT APACHE'. The base is laid out in a circular pattern. A battery of guns, from heavy mortars and 105mm Howitzers to self-propelled 8-inch guns, is revetted and surrounded with sandbags. Most of the base is dug in below ground level -- entrances to bunkers are visible. Below, down the hill, the base is ringed with concertina wire.

A COUPLE GREEN BERETS, severe crew-cuts, sweat-stained short-sleeve fatigues, cold, deadly eyes, stare up into the sky -- at the SOUND of approaching helicopters. A MONTAGNARD stands in the background, also watching --

266 REVERSE ANGLE 266

OVER THE GREEN BERETS, on Chickenhawk and the rest of the Orange Team, descending from the sky, settling down to land in a large, open area on the very top of the hillock. The Yellow Team is already on the ground.

267 CLOSER - HELICOPTER LANDING AREA 267

as Chickenhawk lands. Most of the Yellow Team Hueys have shut down, their rotors still. The crews roll barrels of gasoline to their ships, using regular pumps and nozzles to fill the tanks.

268 CHICKENHAWK 268

as Jeff and Robert climb out -- Behind them, from the rear compartment, Crew, Curtis and Lon get out, followed by the crew from Yellow One. No one speaks --

Jeff and Robert move off by themselves. DECKER, a pilot from the Yellow Team, walks over -- Jeff looks at him. As he speaks, a painful grin possesses Jeff's face --

JEFF
Morris was shot -- I saw him as we took off --

Robert watches as Decker's face shows the same grin of despair.

DECKER
Yeah?
(speaks jerkily, fighting the grin on his face)
How bad is your ship?

(CONTINUED)

268 CONTINUED: 268

JEFF
(eyes show pain, but his mouth curves into a smile)
Not bad. Windshield got hit. A couple rounds in the tail --

DECKER
(vacantly)
Your ship is okay?

JEFF
Yeah. Okay.

The task of maintaining his composure is beyond Decker. Abruptly, his face jerks involuntarily into the horrible grin --

DECKER
Where was he hit?

JEFF
I don't really know, but I think he got it in the chest --

DECKER
Yeah?

JEFF
I think so --

Robert watches the two men -- and he finds himself starting to grin just like they are. RIKER, the surviving pilot from Yellow One, walks slowly over. He looks pale, his face showing the sad child within -- Decker offers him a cigarette. He takes it --

RIKER
(quietly)
The bullet came in through the triangular window -- Went through Morris' flak jacket like it wasn't there -- then all of a sudden he pushed the collective down and we hit the deck. I couldn't stop it. If I'd been a little faster, I could have --

Riker looks at them, as if he wants to say something more. The men are silent. HEAR the distant THUMPING of incoming Hueys. They look up.

(CONTINUED)

268 CONTINUED: (2) 268

JEFF
White Team comin' in -- three birds --

Jeff, Robert, Decker, Riker just stand there, looking up into the sky, cigarette smoke drifting gently, the WHOP-PING SOUND of Hueys rising --

JEFF
Red Team -- three birds -- Altogether, including Morris' ship, we lost three --

Decker moves away. Then Riker -- Jeff and Robert stand watching the in-coming ships. NOW HEAR A CRACK OF THUNDER in the distance --

269 EXT. FORT APACHE HELICOPTER LANDING AREA - DAY (RAIN) 269

A few hours later. 13 Hueys parked on the ground. It is raining, a steady downpour --

270 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 270

Jeff, Robert, Crew, Curtis and Lon are crammed into the rear compartment, trying to sleep. Robert lies on his stomach facing out the open door. Crew lies on his back. Curtis is leaning against the aft bulkhead in the pocket by his machine gun. Lon is on the other side. Jeff lies on the forward bench.

271 ROBERT 271

stares out at the rain, watching it splatter on the edge of the deck --

272 CURTIS 272

flips through a thick stack of snapshots he has taken. He looks across at Lon on the other side.

CURTIS
Hey, Lon -- I can see your pecker.

273 LON 273

opens an eye, looks down at his crotch, then back up at Curtis --

LON
I'm trolling --

(CONTINUED)

273 CONTINUED: 273

CURTIS
But the bait is so small --

LON
You could play a record with yours --

274 JEFF 274

smoking, eyes staring off at nothing --

CUT TO:

275 EXT. FORT APACHE HELICOPTER LANDING AREA - DAY 275

The rain has stopped. It is afternoon now. Crews climb out of their ships and begin prepping them.

276 CHICKENHAWK 276

Robert jumps down out of the rear compartment. Crew moves through his pre-flight inspection in the background. CAMERA MOVES WITH Robert as he walks past Curtis lying on the ground, up to the front of the ship, as Jeff removes two boiling cups of rainwater off a makeshift fire in a can on the ground.

JEFF
Coffee?

ROBERT
Sure.

Jeff carefully tears the top inch off of two coffee packets and dumps the granules in the water. Robert watches as Jeff opens his canteen and pours of shot of something into one of the cups -- Finally Jeff stands, two piping hot cups of coffee in his hands. He takes a sip of the spiked cup, hands the other to Robert. Now they both take careful sips, breathing in sharply as they drink. Jeff lights a cigarette, turns back to the ship. Robert watches him, and then his eyes move to the 'Chickenhawk' decal on the side of the ship, the painting of the brave/afraid bird --

ROBERT
So why do you call her 'Chickenhawk'?

JEFF
Well -- Sometimes I think about quitting -- so I guess that makes me a chicken. And then sometimes, when I'm flying assaults, I start feeling brave -- like a hawk. So I guess what you got here is a Chickenhawk --

(CONTINUED)

276 CONTINUED: 276

Robert laughs nervously at this --

JEFF
(beat)
How are you feeling?

ROBERT
I'm all right --

JEFF
You're doin' fine --

He says this last almost painfully, as Decker, from the Yellow Team, comes over --

DECKER
We just got the call -- Ready at the LZ -- Let's crank 'em --

277 EXT. ORANGE TEAM - NIGHT 277

Total blackness. Except for the glowing position lights of four Hueys, the Orange Team, flying through the air --

278 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - NIGHT 278

Jeff and Robert are lit by the dim instrument lights in the cockpit. Outside, there is a black void. Nothing. Robert is flying. Jeff looks out into the darkness.

ROBERT
Man, I can't see shit --

JEFF
Neither can Charlie --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
There is no fire at the LZ, repeat, no fire --

JEFF
(CLICKS his intercom)
You guys hear that?

279 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT - NIGHT 279

Curtis lounges by his machine gun, Lon by his, and Crew sits between them.

CREW
That's a Roger, we got it.

CURTIS
Charlie goin' to let us land first, then Charlie goin' to say hello --

(CONTINUED)

279 CONTINUED 279

LON
Shut up, will 'ya?

No one says anything for a moment -- they just stare out at the blackness and the rushing wind --

CREW
Maybe this thing is almost over. I don't see how the little fucks can go on much longer --
(beat)
McNamara says we're due out of here in less than a year --

280 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 280

Jeff CLICKS his intercom to talk to the rear compartment. INTERCUT conversation --

JEFF
(CLICKS his intercom)
I don't see Charlie giving up --

CURTIS
At least we know we own everything around here --

ROBERT
(CLICKS his intercom)
That's what they did with the French.

CURTIS
Did what?

ROBERT
(CLICKS intercom)
Made them think they were winning, let them set up their camps -- and then, wham, kicked their asses out --

CREW
(suddenly angry)
Who cares about the French? It's a totally different war now!

Crew glares up at Robert for a long beat. Robert turns to see his look --

CURTIS
Look, LBJ ain't walkin' out on this gunfight -- Doncha think, McDonald?

(CONTINUED)

280 CONTINUED 280

JEFF
(CLICKS intercom)
I think -- we're gonna be here a long time --

Jeff glances at Robert. Now they don't click their intercoms, which isolates their conversation from the rear compartment --

ROBERT
I didn't mean to make anybody mad --

JEFF
You've always got somethin' ticklin' your ass, don't you, Maze?
(beat)
Nobody wants to think what we're doing here is all just a big joke.

ROBERT
(quietly)
I never said it was a joke --

GRUNT (V.O.)
This is Grunt-One on the ground. We can hear you -- You're close -- Keep coming --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange Team, Roger. On final approach --

Jeff gets on the controls --

JEFF
Okay, I'm with you.

ROBERT
Right.

They slow the ship.

GRUNT (V.O.)
Okay, now -- Keep coming down like you are -- Let down a little --

Jeff and Robert respond at the controls.

(CONTINUED)

280 CONTINUED: 280

GRUNT (V.O.)
You should go right -- Now, you should see the flashlights. Can you see the flashlights?

Jeff and Robert look out ahead, straining through the inky blackness.

281 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 281

Down below, in front of the ship, the dull glow of four flashlights, with special night filters, pops into existence, surrounded by total, absolute darkness -- just four little dots of light way down there.

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Roger, we see you --

282 JEFF AND ROBERT 282

JEFF
(to Robert)
We're going for the one on the far right -- Don't stare at the light -- Keep your eyes moving.

ROBERT
Right --

283 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 283

The four flashlights, drifting in darkness --

284 JEFF AND ROBERT 284

tense, concentrating --

285 EXT. CLOSE ON CHICKENHAWK SKID 285

SEE just the dim outline of a skid -- and then all of a sudden the ground rushes up out of nowhere and the skid bumps against it!

286 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 286

as Jeff and Robert bounce with the landing!

JEFF
We're down!

ROBERT
Christ, I didn't --

(CONTINUED)

286 CONTINUED: 286

JEFF
Yeah --

ROBERT
Jesus --

JEFF
(CLICKS his mike)
Orange Four is on the ground.

287 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 287

The flashlight is dead ahead. It starts to move, jiggling toward Chickenhawk.

ORANGE TWO (V.O.)
Orange Two is on the ground.

ORANGE THREE (V.O.)
Orange Three, down.

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange One, down. Load 'em up.

288 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 288

SIX ARVN clamber aboard. The GRUNT with the flashlight jumps on, clicking the flashlight off. Then a WOUNDED ARVN on a stretcher is lifted on --

289 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 289

CREW (V.O.)
We're loaded back here.

JEFF
(CLICKS mike)
Orange Four loaded. We're lifting --

As Jeff and Robert start pulling their collectives, there is a MUFFLED POPPING from outside --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange One, short-arms fire from the treeline!

290 POV - TREELINE 290

Bright, SNAPPING FLASHES in darkness! Like flashbulbs POPPING off!

291 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 291

CURTIS
Here comes Charlie!

Curtis and Lon OPEN FIRE with their machine guns!

292 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 292

as Jeff and Robert pull up their collectives -- Outside Robert's window, SEE A HUGE EXPLOSION erupt from the ground, momentarily lighting up everything!

JEFF
(into mike)
Orange Four, we got mortar fire!

ORANGE THREE (V.O.)
Orange Three, we got --

293 EXT. ORANGE THREE (MODEL-EFFECT) 293

Suddenly Orange Three EXPLODES INTO FLAMES! The entire ship comes apart! The main rotor blades fly off!

294 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 294

Chickenhawk is rocked by the BLAST, the cockpit bathed in fiery orange!

295 POV OF ORANGE THREE (MODEL-EFFECT) 295

from Jeff's window, as Chickenhawk lifts off into the air, the burning, EXPLODING ship getting smaller and smaller as the ground pulls away --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Who was that?!

ORANGE TWO (V.O.)
Orange Two, Orange Three's destroyed!

296 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 296

JEFF
(into mike)
Orange Four is in the air.
(looks ahead)
Orange Four, we got tracers, dead ahead!

297 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT (EFFECT) 297

Out of the darkness in front of the ship, glowing globs of light appear! They seem to float stationary for a moment,

(CONTINUED)

297 CONTINUED: 297

bobbing up and down, and then they grow larger, their trails spreading out behind them! They are coming right at us! Suddenly they WHOOSH past the cockpit!

298 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 298

On either side of Jeff and Robert, out the windows, glowing, streaming, fire-flowing tracers STREAK BY like miniature comets. There seem to be millions of them whizzing by, MOANING AND CRACKLING as they pass.

299 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 299

The tracers WHOOSH by outside. Suddenly Lon is hit! His chest erupts and he is thrown back against the bulkhead with a SLAMMING FORCE! Curtis leaps from his machine gun, across the compartment, pushing aside ARVN, SCREAMING:

CURTIS
Lon! Lon!

300 ON JEFF (EFFECT) 300

CREW (V.O.)
Lon's hit!

Jeff turns to look --

ORANGE TWO (V.O.)
Orange Two's in the air -- I think we're right beside you, Orange Four --

Before Jeff can turn back to look out his side window -- Orange Two SUDDENLY appears out of the darkness as it EXPLODES INTO FLAMES -- 50 feet away out Jeff's window!

301 EXT. ORANGE TWO (EFFECT) 301

No longer a helicopter, Orange Two is an expanding, ROARING fireball! The flaming pieces rain down in the night --

302 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 302

The light from the blast fades -- Now the tracers are fewer, and in a couple seconds they disappear all together. Jeff and Robert are like frozen statues on their controls --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
Orange One's in the air --
(beat)
Anybody there?

(CONTINUED)

302 CONTINUED: 302

JEFF
This is Orange Four. Orange Three's destroyed --

ORANGE ONE (V.O.)
(beat)
Roger.

JEFF
(CLICKS his intercom)
What's goin' on back there?

CREW (V.O.)
Lon's still alive -- but he's hit pretty bad -- And there's a guy back here -- acting crazy --

Jeff turns to look.

303 JEFF'S POV 303

SEE Lon cradled in Curtis' arms on one side of the rear compartment. Curtis holds Lon's hand. CAMERA PANS ACROSS the compartment -- SEE everyone watching the grunt with the flashlight, sitting on the bench on the other side next to the open door and the rushing wind. He makes wide gestures with his arms, orchestrating some private nightmare, but we can't hear him. Crew sits close to him, his .45 ready.

CREW
He's talking fast -- but he won't talk into my mike -- I can't tell what he's saying --

304 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 304

JEFF
Just watch him --

Jeff turns back. Then takes his hands off the controls.

JEFF
(to Robert)
You got it.

Robert gives no reply. Just silence.

CUT TO:

305 EXT. GOLF COURSE HOSPITAL - NIGHT 305

Chickenhawk sits on the pad near the hospital, rotors turning full throttle. Kerosene-lamp light from the open hospital doorway illuminates the medics and Jane as they rush to the rear compartment.

306 CLOSER - REAR COMPARTMENT 306

Jane and the medics lift the litter carrying the wounded ARVN down from the rear compartment. Then Curtis, holding up Lon, steps off. Jane and the medics lift Lon onto a stretcher and whisk him inside, Curtis right alongside, still holding Lon's hand. The crazy, still-gesturing grunt stumbles down, helped by Crew. Crew grabs the grunt by his arm and leads him into the hospital --

307 JEFF AND ROBERT 307

stare out of the cockpit, watching --

308 POV THRU HOSPITAL DOORS 308

Inside, SEE a COUPLE DOCTORS start working on Lon. SEE Curtis watching nearby. SEE Crew and the crazy grunt. And SEE Jane in the doorway, turn for a moment, look out at Chickenhawk, at Jeff and Robert, pain in her face --

309 EXT. HUEY CITY - NIGHT 309

Chickenhawk's rotors come to a stop. Jeff and Robert get out, followed by the rest of ARVN from the rear. Most of the other ships are down by now, some with their rotors still turning. Crews and ARVN disembark.

CAMERA FOLLOWS Jeff and Robert as they walk away from Chickenhawk, numb, their eyes staring ahead, their bodies blasted from tension and fatigue -- Wired and tired. In the background, SEE a pilot who has just thrown up by his ship --

JEFF
We don't strike first, we always get ambushed -- We don't take ground, we fly and die -- We fight against guns in the foliage, and when we're done everything's the same as when we started --

They walk a little further, CAMERA FOLLOWING --

ROBERT
It's wrong, man --

JEFF
It is the way it is.

ROBERT
That's just not good enough --

Jeff stops, turns to Robert --

309 CONTINUED: 309

JEFF
(hard)
What are you going to do about it, Maze?

ROBERT
(angry)
Whose war is this anyway? If the people who have the most at stake here won't even get out of the helicopter to fight -- why are we fighting?

JEFF
Because we're here!
(beat)
So what are you gonna do? How are you gonna fucking change it?

Silence. Robert looks at him.

ROBERT
I can't change it --

JEFF
Then just do your job --
(beat)
You were good today. Pretty soon you'll have your own ship -- Then you can bitch to somebody else about what's wrong with the world --

Jeff walks away -- Robert stares after him --

310 EXT. JEFF'S HOOCH - NIGHT 310

Later. Jeff is seated outside his hooch, drinking from a bottle. Distant campfires. The occasional POPPING of small-arms fire. Robert slowly walks up. Jeff looks up at him, nods a greeting, takes another drink --

JEFF
One of our pilots -- a warrant officer -- just walked into the operations tent and turned in his wings. He put them on the table and said 'Enough'!

ROBERT
What did they do to him?

JEFF
I don't know --

(CONTINUED)

310 CONTINUED: 310

ROBERT
Is it legal just to quit?

JEFF
Got me. Probably they'll shoot him or cut off his balls --

Jeff takes another drink --

ROBERT
(beat)
I'm sorry if I -- pissed you off --

JEFF
Don't worry about it --

ROBERT
(beat)
What's wrong, man?

JEFF
Nothing.

ROBERT
What's going on? What is it?

JEFF
(beat)
Just watch your own ass from now on, will you?

ROBERT
(defensively)
I will --

JEFF
You can't depend on somebody else being there -- 'cause one day they're not gonna be there -- and that's a fuckin' earthquake --

Jeff keeps on drinking, slowly, methodically. He doesn't look at Robert. Robert wants to say something, wants to make a connection somehow -- but Jeff won't let him. Finally, Robert turns and walks away --

CUT TO:

311 BLACK SCREEN 311

Silence. Now begin to HEAR STREET SOUNDS. SUPERIMPOSE:

1968

(CONTINUED)

311 CONTINUED: 311

Then, SUPERIMPOSE:

January 1st

312 EXT. SAIGON HOTEL - DAY 312

START CLOSE ON A SIGN: 'SAIGON HOTEL METROPOLE'. PULL BACK revealing the front entrance of a semi-run-down Saigon hotel. VIETNAMESE pass by, some on bicycles. A bus pulls up in front of the hotel, WIPING FRAME --

313 INT. SAIGON HOTEL LOBBY - DAY 313

Jeff and Robert, dressed in chinos, checked shirts and loafers, carrying canvas suitcases, stride into the lobby.

It's not a bad place, actually. Semi-clean. A few over-stuffed chairs with the stuffing leaking out here and there. A couple ceiling fans. A FEW TOURISTS mingle about.

Jeff and Robert look brighter, rested. A VIETNAMESE CIVILIAN GUIDE, dressed in a nice suit, a big smile on his face, meets them in the middle of the lobby --

VIET GUIDE
Okay, boys, you have come to the right place. Come right this way, I'll help you get your rooms.

ROBERT
You with the United States government?

The guide flashes an i.d.

VIET GUIDE
Yes, yes -- We must hurry. There is so much to do in Saigon --

314 INT. JEFF'S ROOM - DAY 314

Jeff walks in. Small. Dark walls. Wooden blinds over the windows, giving the room a moody, half-lit quality. Ceiling fan. A large brass bed.

Jeff drops his suitcase, steps into --

315 INT. BATHROOM 315

Immediately, Jeff crosses the small bathroom to the john, a glistening-white flush toilet. Jeff stares at it, then tries the handle. The thing FLUSHES LOUDLY.

JEFF
Hey, man --

316 INT. ROBERT'S ROOM - DAY 316

Much the same as Jeff's. Jeff sticks his head in --

JEFF
Robert -- Man, you gotta see this --

Robert emerges from his bathroom, a huge grin on his face.

ROBERT
Hey, you gotta see my toilet! You gotta see it actually flush!

CUT TO:

317 INT. LOBBY - DAY 317

Jeff and Robert step off the elevator, and are met by the ever-buoyant Vietnamese Guide --

VIET GUIDE
Come, come, gentlemen, we must hurry. There is much to do in Saigon. Remember, you are here to enjoy yourselves, and I am here to help you --

JEFF
Well, thank you --

VIET GUIDE
First, we must go across the street to a fine, high-class bar and have a drink to discuss our plans. You must tell me what you want to do and I will be your guide.

The guide starts walking ahead of Jeff and Robert, almost walking backward as he talks to them --

VIET GUIDE
This way, gentlemen, this way --

318 INT. SAIGON BAR - DAY 318

Certainly not high-class by U.S. standards, but, again, not bad. The Viet Guide, followed by Jeff and Robert, walk in through the door. THIRTY OR THIRTY-FIVE VIETNAMESE WOMEN sit along one wall, side by side in chairs. They are all extremely good-looking. The Viet Guide herds Jeff and Robert toward the beginning of the line --

VIET GUIDE
Martha, so good to see you this evening --

(CONTINUED)

318 CONTINUED: 318

The first girl smiles, nods warmly to Jeff and Robert. The guide moves them quickly down the line --

VIET GUIDE
Sharon, Vickie -- How are you?

The girls all smile and nod. The guide now moves Jeff and Robert over to a small table away from the girls. They sit.

JEFF
Are their names really Martha and Vickie and Sharon?

VIET GUIDE
Yes, yes -- All very nice girls.

A VIETNAMESE WAITER walks up.

VIET GUIDE
Drinks, gentlemen -- ?

ROBERT
I'll have a beer. Any kind.

JEFF
Two.

The waiter nods, walks away.

VIET GUIDE
So, gentlemen, which ones do you want?

ROBERT
You mean which one of those girls?

VIET GUIDE
Of course. Tell me which one you prefer and she will be with you like that --
(SNAPS his fingers)

JEFF
Well, I did see one girl I kinda liked. Didn't get her name.

VIET GUIDE
Where is she sitting?

Jeff glances over at the girls --

319 POV - CLOSE ON SHARON 319

In a purple dress. Extremely pretty. SHARON glances back at Jeff --

320 JEFF, ROBERT, VIET GUIDE 320

JEFF
That one. She's the tenth girl. She's wearing a purple dress.

VIET GUIDE
Ah, Sharon. You have very high-class taste, Jeff. What about you, Robert?

ROBERT
Well -- ah -- I guess I like that one near the end, the one in blue.

VIET GUIDE
Yes, yes, that is Vickie. I will be right back, soon. Drink up.

The guide gets up and walks over to the girls at about the same time the waiter returns with the drinks. Jeff and Robert take big swigs --

ROBERT
Is this bullshit here, or what?

JEFF
I think we should just go with the flow for a little while --

ROBERT
(looks, nods)
Say, isn't that --

Jeff looks.

321 JEFF'S POV 321

of Sharon, the girl in purple, as she comes walking over -- She smiles, her eyes locked on Jeff, walking toward him -- closer --

322 JEFF AND ROBERT 322

-- and walks right past the table. Jeff and Robert watch her as she --

323 JEFF'S POV 323

-- walks over to a MAN seated at a table at the other end of the room. Sharon sits down across from her escort, facing CAMERA.

324 JEFF AND ROBERT 324

ROBERT
I thought she was the one you ordered.

JEFF
I thought so too --

325 JEFF'S POV 325

of Sharon, smiling gently at her escort, then her eyes moving to Jeff. She stares back at Jeff, with an expression on her face that looks a whole lot like love.

326 JEFF AND ROBERT 326

ROBERT
She's lookin' at you like I've never seen someone look --

They both turn as the Viet Guide returns to the table, two girls with him. Both are very pretty and smile -- They are dressed very nicely and carry evening bags.

VIET GUIDE
Linda, this is Jeff -- Vickie, this is Robert --

The girls sit down with Jeff and Robert.

VIET GUIDE
I must see about drinks --

The guide disappears --

JEFF
Well, hello --

LINDA
Hello --

ROBERT
Hi.

VICKIE
Hello.

LINDA leans across the table and whispers to Jeff --

LINDA
It is so sad that you could not get the one you loved. Do you wish me to leave?

(CONTINUED)

326 CONTINUED: 326

JEFF
No, of course not --

LINDA
She asked me to tell you this: she loves you very much, but she cannot be with you --

Jeff glances up, across at --

327 JEFF'S POV 327

of Sharon -- talking to her escort -- now looking back at Jeff, her eyes on him, smiling --

328 JEFF, ROBERT, LINDA, VICKIE 328

LINDA
She is more beautiful than I am.

Jeff's eyes go right to Linda.

JEFF
Don't be silly. You are more beautiful.

LINDA
Thank you for saying so.

A beat. Everyone at the table has big, nervous smiles.

ROBERT
So -- What's the deal here, ladies?

VICKIE
We are your companions -- for ten dollars a day.

329 INT. VIETNAM NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT 329

Swirling colored lights. Smoke. 'It's All Over Now' by the Rolling Stones ROARS from a jukebox. Robert dances with VICKIE. Both are drunk, both LAUGHING, having a great time --

Jeff dances with Linda. He pulls her close, kisses her --

330 INT. ROBERT'S ROOM - NIGHT 330

Robert and Vickie, under the covers, in bed -- She sleeps soundly. Robert's eyes are open, staring --

331 INT. JEFF'S ROOM - DAWN 331

Linda is asleep. Jeff sits up, smoking a cigarette, drinking from a bottle, staring at the dawn light coming through the slatted window --

CUT TO:

332 INT. SAIGON BAR - DAY 332

Jeff and Linda, Robert and Vickie sit at a table in the bar where they first met. Jeff drinks whiskey, the others drink beer. In the background, an old black-and-white TV set is on.

ROBERT
Let's go back to that restaurant you liked so much last night --

JEFF
Last night?

ROBERT
Sure. Don't you remember the snails you had?

JEFF
I have never eaten snails in my entire life --

ROBERT
You had about three dozen last night.

JEFF
I gotta stop drinking so much.

ROBERT
Why? You <u>loved</u> those snails.

Linda and Vickie speak to each other in Vietnamese --

LINDA
Excuse us, please --

They both get up and walk away from the table -- Robert slurps his beer, watching them leave --

ROBERT
Those girls look so cute and so shy. It's really a shock to find out that they <u>love</u> to do it --

Jeff reaches in his pocket, brings out his wallet. He opens it and spreads the contents on the table, searching for something --

(CONTINUED)

332 CONTINUED: 332

JEFF
Remember that guy who quit a couple months ago? Well, they sent him here to Saigon. He's operating an in-country R&R center.

ROBERT
They <u>let</u> him quit?

JEFF
Technically, I guess warrant officers are volunteers, and if anyone can't take it, he can resign from flight status --

ROBERT
I don't believe it -- You mean we can actually <u>quit</u>?

Jeff has found what he's been looking for -- an old, folded-up map. He spreads it out amid the other contents of his wallet --

JEFF
You know -- there are some islands about twenty miles from Qui Nhon. Here.
(points to the map)
Completely uninhabited.
(beat)
How long do you think I could live on a Huey-load of C rations?

ROBERT
Probably a couple years. Two thousand pounds of food --

JEFF
Maybe I could take less food and take Linda with me --

Robert glances at the contents of Jeff's wallet, reaches out, pushes a small pile of letters off of a picture of Jeff's father --

JEFF
So what do you think?

ROBERT
You're gonna quit? Is that it?

(CONTINUED)

332 CONTINUED: (2) 332

JEFF
I could do it. I just need a radio with me so I can keep track of the war, so I know what I'm missing --

ROBERT
(indicates the picture)
Your father?

Jeff just nods sullenly. Takes another drink. He's really drunk now --

ROBERT
You know, that first night I went to your hooch -- I saw the picture of your father -- and the announcement. You never told me he was dead --

JEFF
Fuck you.

ROBERT
What?

JEFF
You gotta get into everything! You gotta analyze the whole war, you gotta analyze my life! Just back off, Maze!

ROBERT
Wait a minute, man --

JEFF
You just can't leave anything alone, can you? Well, just watch my lips! Back the fuck off!

There's dead silence between them. Linda and Vickie return to the table, talking quickly and urgently to each other in Vietnamese. Finally Linda points to the old black-and-white TV set --

LINDA
Listen --

333 CLOSE ON TV 333

A LOCAL VIETNAMESE REPORTER gives the news --

VIET REPORTER
Intelligence sources report a threatening concentration of North
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

333 CONTINUED: 333

VIET REPORTER (CONT'D)
Vietnamese forces in the Khe Sanh region and other northern regions of South Vietnam. The 36-hour unilateral truce has been cancelled by the United States. The following bulletin has been issued by the United States Command here: "There may be Viet Cong activities aimed at various headquarters and government billets during the Tet New Year holidays. Viet Cong artillery units and Viet Cong suicide cadres are infiltrating into the capital area."

334 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JEFF'S ROOM - DAY 334

A door opens. Jeff stands there, wrapped in a towel. In the background, SEE Linda in bed, covered with the sheet. Robert stands in the hall. There is a coldness, a distance between them now.

ROBERT
Our leave's been cancelled. We gotta go back.

335 INT. LOBBY - DAY 335

Dressed, carrying their suitcases, Jeff and Robert step off the elevator, escorting the girls. They start across the lobby. Robert and Vickie move away as Jeff and Linda stop, see --

336 POV 336

Through the front door, SEE the bus loading up with other G.I.s. And also SEE Sharon, the girl Jeff didn't get, standing in the lobby.

337 JEFF AND LINDA 337

LINDA
It is all right. You must say goodbye to her.

Jeff nods, walks across the lobby, up to Sharon.

338 JEFF AND SHARON 338

Sharon smiles, gently -- her eyes filled with tears --

JEFF
Hello --

(CONTINUED)

338 CONTINUED: 338

Sharon suddenly puts her arms around Jeff, holding him. Then they are holding each other. Tightly.

SHARON
Please be careful.

Sharon pulls away, kisses Jeff quickly on the lips, then disappears out the door into the bustling Saigon street.

CUT TO:

339 BLACK SCREEN 339

Silence. SUPERIMPOSE:

January 30

Then, SUPERIMPOSE:

Tet

CUT TO:

340 EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY 340

FAST TRACKING SHOT with Major Fields, Jeff, Robert, and other pilots as they wind their way through the camp. Lots of activity going on around them. Troops running, last-minute supplies moved --

FIELDS
The VC have taken our embassy in Saigon. Our M.P.s and the Viet police have the place surrounded, but nobody's making a move --

JEFF
What the hell's going on?

FIELDS
It's a major offensive by Charlie -- from the DMZ to the Mekong Delta --

341 EXT. HUEY CITY - DAY 341

16 Hueys, ROARING, rotors strobing, ready to go --

342 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - DAY 342

Jeff is in the right seat. DEETH, 22, sits in the left seat. Chickenhawk bounces with full-throttle power.

343 CLOSE ON DECAL 343

The decal reads: 'ACE OF SPADES', with a painted Ace of Spades. CAMERA PANS FROM the decal UP TO the cockpit. SEE Robert sitting right seat, EVANS, 22, sitting left seat --

CUT TO:

344 EXT. VIETNAM COUNTRYSIDE - DAY 344

16 Hueys fly over the expanse of rice paddies and jungle.

CUT TO:

345 EXT. SECOND LZ - DAY 345

GRUNTS in the foreground crouch behind a mound of dirt, FIRING, low-running, dashing around -- MORTAR BLASTS hit everywhere. Smoke drifts. It's a nightmare. In the background, SEE Hueys coming in on final, SEE Chickenhawk and Ace of Spades make their landings --

Stretcher bearers shove wounded grunts into the rear compartments --

CUT TO:

346 EXT. GOLF COURSE HOSPITAL - DAY 346

The wounded are lifted from Chickenhawk. Jane helps with a litter.

347 JEFF 347

watches from the cockpit.

348 EXT. HUEY CITY - DAY 348

Ace of Spades has shut down. Robert and the rest of the crew get out. Other Hueys land and take off behind them. Fields runs up to Robert --

FIELDS
You got to get back up. A Jeep was just hit five clicks from here --

Robert and his crew wearily turn back to their ship --

CUT TO:

349 EXT. ROAD - DAY 349

The Jeep, twisted like a child's toy, the edge of the crumpled and torn metal still smoking, sits awkwardly by

(CONTINUED)

349 CONTINUED: 349

the side of a paved road. SOLDIERS stand around the Jeep. A smoke-marker billows in a field. VIETNAMESE PEASANTS stream by on the road, some carrying their belongings in little wrapped parcels, some carrying BABIES, SMALL CHILDREN. Ace of Spades drops down into FRAME, landing in the field just next to the road.

350 ROBERT 350

in Ace of Spades' cockpit, watching --

351 POV FROM ACE OF SPADES COCKPIT 351

as soldiers carry the wounded to the rear compartment --

CUT TO:

352 EXT. GOLF COURSE HOSPITAL - DAY 352

Ace of Spades is on the pad by the hospital. The transfer of the wounded continues --

353 ROBERT 353

from the cockpit, watches --

CUT TO:

354 EXT. HUEY CITY - NIGHT 354

Robert and Evans stumble away from Ace of Spades -- dog tired. Fields comes up to meet them --

FIELDS
We're going to need you tonight --

ROBERT
What?

FIELDS
It's almost 2000 now. Eat some chow and be back on the flight line ready to crank at 2200 hours --

ROBERT
Are you trying to kill us?

FIELDS
No, I'm not trying to kill you -- You got some sleep last night, right?

ROBERT
Yes.

(CONTINUED)

354 CONTINUED: 354

FIELDS
So be ready to go at 2200 hours --

CUT TO:

355 CLOSE ON COLLECTIVE 355

as Robert's hand pulls it up --

356 EXT. HUEY CITY - NIGHT 356

as Ace of Spades lifts off into the darkness --

CUT TO:

357 INT. JEFF'S HOOCH - NIGHT 357

Jeff, asleep, is abruptly awakened --

DEETH
Jeff -- Come on, they want us to crank up --

Jeff looks at his watch.

JEFF
It's four-thirty -- I just got in here --

CUT TO:

358 POV FROM CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 358

of the sun sliding up over the distant horizon. Most of the sky is still dark over the shrub-covered hills and valleys of elephant grass --

359 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - DAWN 359

Jeff sips from a canteen of coffee while Deeth is at the controls. Both men look bleary-eyed.

PREACHER-SIX (V.O.)
Red Two, Preacher-Six.

JEFF
Red Two, go.

PREACHER-SIX (V.O.)
Ah, Red Two, Golf Course has relayed instructions that you are to proceed two miles north of LZ Bird --

360 POV FROM CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 360

Now the sun is up -- mid-morning -- and we LOOK DOWN on a lone Huey parked in a very small clearing in the jungle below --

PREACHER-SIX (V.O.)
Red Two, Golf Course wants you to land and make an on-site inspection. The crew reported landing because of engine trouble -- then we never heard from them again --

361 JEFF 361

JEFF
Red Two, that's a Roger.
(beat)
Shit -- Not enough room in that clearing for us to set down --

CUT TO:

362 EXT. TREELINE - DAY 362

Chickenhawk settles into a 100-foot hover directly over some small trees.

363 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 363

Curtis leans out the open door, staring back at Chickenhawk's tail --

CURTIS
(into mike)
Okay, the tail rotor's clear all the way down --

364 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 364

JEFF
Okay -- Here we go --

The trees outside Jeff's window begin to rise up as Chickenhawk slowly descends --

365 LONG LENS - CHICKENHAWK IN TREES 365

Through the trees we see Chickenhawk descending -- Suddenly there is a HORRENDOUSLY LOUD, BUZZING EXPLOSION!

366 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 366

As the trees rise up in front of the cockpit, splintered wood flies everywhere! Smoke! Debris! And the awful GRINDING, WHINING of the main rotor CHOPPING its way through the trees!

367 JEFF 367

Smoke and fragments of wood ROAR outside Jeff's window as he expertly guides the ship down --

368 LONG LENS - CHICKENHAWK IN TREES 368

Through the trees SEE just an outline of Chickenhawk amid the EXPLODING, GUNFIRE-LIKE BUZZ-SAWING SOUND and flying wood and twigs and leaves!

369 EXT. GROUND 369

Smoke totally OBSCURES FRAME. Then the GRINDING SOUND stops. The smoke starts to clear -- revealing Chickenhawk sitting on the ground, amid swirling debris, ass-end low on a gentle slope covered with dense undergrowth. A beat as the twigs and leaves settle around it. The rotors continue to turn --

370 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 370

as Curtis steps out, looks toward the rear --

CURTIS
(into mike)
The tail made it. Everything's great back here --

371 EXT. SIDE OF SHIP 371

Jeff opens his door and leans out, looking up -- Behind him SEE Curtis aiming his camera up, taking a snapshot of--

372 JEFF'S POV 372

straight up, of the tunnel chopped down through the trees.

373 JEFF 373

leans back in the cockpit --

JEFF
(to Deeth)
Keep her running. We'll be back.

374 EXT. JUNGLE WOODS - DAY 374

CAMERA MOVES WITH Jeff and Curtis as they make their way through the thick tangle of weeds, bushes and trees. In the background, SEE Chickenhawk on the ground, still running. There's a mist in the trees, eerily backlit by the sun streaming through -- Curtis turns and quickly SNAPS a picture of the ship with his camera --

375 EXT. HUEY IN CLEARING - DAY 375

The Huey, its decal reading: 'Bounty Hunters', lies in the middle of the clearing, its rotors still. It looks fine, neither crashed nor badly damaged. Just empty. Jeff and Curtis approach carefully.

376 JEFF AND CURTIS 376

stop. Listen. Their eyes moving -- There is an unsettling silence. Just the jungle SOUNDS, birds, the wind through the trees --

CURTIS
Looks okay --

JEFF
Yeah --

They scan the area --

377 JEFF'S POV 377

PANNING from the Bounty Hunters helicopter, across the clearing. SEE TWO VIETNAMESE WOMEN carrying water jugs suspended from poles, walking casually along through the trees.

378 JEFF AND CURTIS 378

Curtis aims his camera and takes a picture of the two women, as Jeff's eyes stop moving. He looks up, into the trees -- Now Curtis sees it too --

379 JEFF'S POV 379

of some trees -- and four shapes hanging in the trees. We are close enough to see that it is the crew from the helicopter, but not close enough to see much detail, except that the men hang by their feet from ropes, and they are stripped to the waist, and their skin is a bright red --

380 JEFF AND CURTIS 380

look. Curtis lowers his camera and begins to cry softly. CAMERA MOVES IN ON Jeff as he starts to lose control too. Tears begin to form in his eyes. He stares, his eyes burning --

CUT TO:

381 EXT. VIETNAMESE GRAVEYARD - NIGHT 381

CAMERA SLOWLY MOVES, showing a Vietnamese graveyard, now an outpost held by Americans in the Viet Cong wilderness. SEE a tableau of Vietnam: drifting smoke, distant fire-fights CHATTERING away, GRUNTS moving slowly along, numb, tired, carrying weapons -- MOVE PAST several GRUNTS sitting behind gravestones, wide awake, the 1000-yard stare in their eyes. Finally, MOVE UP TO a couple helicopters parked --

382 INT. ACE OF SPADES REAR COMPARTMENT - NIGHT 382

Robert and the crew of Ace of Spades are spread out, trying to get some sleep. Most of them are awake, though. Robert sort of half-dozes. A SERGEANT wanders up to the open door, reaches in and shakes Robert's shoulder --

SERGEANT
Come on, get up --

ROBERT
(opens his eyes)
What?

SERGEANT
Get up.

ROBERT
What time is it?

SERGEANT
Almost four-thirty. You got another mission to go on, right now --

The sergeant moves off. Robert slowly climbs out of the rear compartment as the other crew members climb to their feet. Robert looks --

383 ROBERT'S POV 383

of Jeep headlights bouncing up and down across the graveyard, finally coming to a stop 50 feet away. FIGURES walk from behind the headlights, into their bright cones of light. Silhouette tunnels of darkness arrow out and waver in front of the headlights, coming closer --

384 ROBERT 384

is so unbelievably tired, but he stands up straight as a CAPTAIN and a COUPLE SERGEANTS come up --

CAPTAIN
Which one of you is the aircraft commander?

384 CONTINUED: 384

ROBERT
I am.

CAPTAIN
Fort Apache was hit an hour ago. Bad. You gotta start air-lifting them out at first light -- in about thirty minutes --

CUT TO:

385 EXT. JEFF'S HOOCH - DAY 385

Jeff, sound asleep inside his hooch --

DEETH
Jeff! Come on, get up!

Jeff's eyes open -- He looks bad --

DEETH
They hit Fort Apache. We gotta go.

386 EXT. OPERATIONS TENT - DAY 386

Jeff staggers up to Fields outside the operations tent. Fields, drinking coffee, looks blasted too, but Jeff resembles a zombie. He looks ill --

JEFF
I can't fly now. I have flown too much. I just got back two hours ago, and I flew eleven hours yesterday, ten hours the day before, twenty hours the day before that. I can't fly now.

Without waiting for a reply, Jeff turns and stumbles away.

387 INT. JEFF'S HOOCH - DAY 387

A couple hours later. Jeff is half-asleep in his hooch. The sun beats down unmercifully. Jeff rolls over, drenched with sweat. He crawls off his mattress and pushes his face down into the cool earth. His eyelids are swollen shut. He's now awake, but his eyes won't open -- He tries to stand up. He doesn't make it and collapses in a heap. He SLAMS his fist into the ground in frustration.

JEFF
I can't fly now --

Finally he manages to open his eyes --

388 JEFF'S POV 388

Half-buried in the rubble inside the hooch, SEE the Air Cav playing card -- the Ace of Spades, one corner of it stuck down into the ground. SEE Robert's inscription: 'The spade ace is here'.

389 JEFF 389

Stares at it.

390 EXT. HUEY CITY - DAY 390

MOVING WITH Jeff as he strides toward Chickenhawk. Dressed in his flight suit, he wears sunglasses. Somehow, he looks refreshed, ready to go. Hueys are landing and taking off. Crews rush around madly.

As Jeff passes Fields --

FIELDS
Thought you couldn't fly, McDonald.

JEFF
I was just kidding.
(beat)
Have you seen Maze?

FIELDS
He's on route. Everybody's workin' Fort Apache. Things are starting to turn sour out there --

JEFF
I'm on my way --

CUT TO:

391 EXT. FORT APACHE - DAY 391

OPEN CLOSE on the Fort Apache sign. Black smoke swirls around it. PULL BACK to reveal the besieged camp. There is fighting going on -- sapper fire, snipers in the foliage. Green Berets carry wounded on litters. Just a few MORTARS HIT on the edge of camp. Sporadic FIRE from the gun emplacements.

392 EXT. HELICOPTER LANDING AREA 392

Chickenhawk makes a landing, then sits on the ground as wounded are loaded aboard.

393 JEFF 393

in the cockpit, watching. He looks up, sees --

394 JEFF'S POV 394

of Ace of Spades coming down into a hover a few feet away, then making a clumsy, bouncing landing amid swirling dust.

395 INT. ACE OF SPADES COCKPIT 395

Robert looks like death -- tired beyond tired. Now Robert looks over, sees --

396 ROBERT'S POV 396

of Chickenhawk, Jeff, grinning, giving him the finger.

397 ROBERT 397

starts LAUGHING. Not funny laughter. More like sobbing with a smile --

398 JEFF 398

LAUGHING too --

399 ROBERT 399

LAUGHING hysterically, looks out front --

400 ROBERT'S POV 400

of his CREW CHIEF, standing in front of Ace of Spades, frantically giving the 'cutthroat' signal to shut down.

401 JEFF 401

sees him too, and CLICKS his mike --

JEFF
See that, Maze? He wants to kill himself.

402 ROBERT 402

LAUGHS harder now, so much that it begins to hurt. The crew chief comes up to his window, looks at Robert curiously.

CREW CHIEF
We're losing gas. Shut her down.

Robert gets control of himself, nods, shuts down Ace of Spades. He looks over --

403 ROBERT'S POV 403

as Chickenhawk lifts off, Jeff staring at him -- SEE a flash of Jeff's expression: concern --

403 CONTINUED: 403

JEFF
(OVER radio)
You take care of yourself --

404 ROBERT 404

staring back, watching Chickenhawk take off --

405 EXT. ACE OF SPADES 405

SEE Chickenhawk flying away in the distance, as Ace of Spades' rotors come to a stop, and Robert gets out. Robert walks to the crew chief who has the engine cowling open and looks inside from a ladder.

CREW CHIEF
We must have taken some rounds through the fuel lines. She's not flyable --

Robert nods, turns away from the ship, staring --

406 ROBERT'S POV 406

of Fort Apache under siege. GUNFIRE. Smoke. MORTARS.

407 ROBERT 407

seems almost numb to it all. He looks up --

408 ROBERT'S POV (MATTE) 408

of storm clouds in the distance -- dark, sliding across the sun as it sets. SEE lightning inside the clouds. And SEE the small, whirling dot of Chickenhawk as it moves toward the storm.

CUT TO:

409 EXT. HUEY CITY - NIGHT 409

It is raining hard as Chickenhawk makes a landing.

410 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 410

as Jeff shuts down. Rain SPLATTERS against the windshield. Lightning flashes outside.

411 INT. OPERATIONS TENT - NIGHT 411

Fields, a couple officers and various pilots gather around a two-way radio. It is pouring rain outside. Jeff dashes in --

(CONTINUED)

411 CONTINUED: 411

FIELDS
(into two-way)
Orange Four, we are totally weathered in here. We can't send a maintenance ship out tonight, we can't send anything out tonight. We'll try in the morning.

412 EXT. FORT APACHE - NIGHT 412

It is not raining here. Robert talks into a two-way operated by a Green Beret. Behind them, MORTARS are going off.

ROBERT
Orange Four, understand there will be no further airlifts until morning?

413 INT. OPERATIONS TENT 413

FIELDS
Orange Four, that's a Roger. As soon as the weather changes, we'll be on our way to you.

ROBERT (V.O.)
Orange Four, Roger. Out.

Silence. The seriousness of the situation hits Jeff -- Fields rubs his eyes, then sips from a cup of coffee.

JEFF
You know they're expecting a full-scale assault over there tonight -- ?

FIELDS
I know. It's happening all over. In the last ten days, Charlie's hit three-fourths of the province capitals, sixty-four towns, villages, base camps -- Charlie's trying to win --

JEFF
Are we standing by, in case the weather changes?

Fields looks up at him wearily.

FIELDS
Yeah -- we're standing by --

Jeff nods, turns and walks out into the rain --

414 EXT. FORT APACHE - NIGHT 414

CAMERA MOVES WITH Robert and his crew as they race along behind a Green Beret, winding their way around sandbags and shell craters. MORTARS BLAST all around them. They finally reach a bunker entrance. Robert carries his shotgun, gestures his crew inside the bunker --

415 INT. BUNKER - NIGHT 415

It's dark. Smoky. Like the inside of some prehistoric cave. The walls are dirt and sandbags. There are small peepholes. Green Berets man the machine guns -- They BLAST AWAY, spent shells flying --

Robert and the crew scramble in, hunker against the wall. The bunker reverberates with the SCREAMING, SLAPPING machine gun fire --

Then slowly, as if on some invisible cue, the Green Berets one by one stop firing -- until there is only silence and drifting smoke in the bunker.

Robert and the crew look around. It's quiet. Robert's eyes move up to the roof of the bunker --

416 EXT. FORT APACHE 416

Quiet. Drifting smoke. The shelling has stopped.

417 INT. BUNKER 417

It's very still now -- Robert moves from his spot on the wall, over to one of the peepholes. He looks out.

418 ROBERT'S POV 418

Looking down slightly, across a no-man's land filled with concertina wire and claymore mines, to the treeline at the edge of the clear ground. Drifting smoke. Silence. Nothing to be seen.

419 ROBERT 419

looks to his right.

420 ROBERT'S POV 420

at the edge of the concertina wire. Foliage WHISHING in the night wind --

421 ROBERT 421

looks off to his left --

422 ROBERT'S POV 422

at the other edge of camp, a little clearing between the trees -- again, silence. Nothing moves.

423 ROBERT 423

steps back from the peephole. Glances at his crew. Then at the Green Berets.

The Green Berets pull back from the machine guns. Again, as if by some cue, they all crouch down on the floor, their backs against the walls, arms folded in front of them, heads down.

Robert follows their example, crouches down --

A long beat. Silence.

And then it starts -- Machine gun FIRE. MORTARS HITTING. And the HUGE THUMP of heavy artillery.

424 EXT. FORT APACHE 424

An incredible BARRAGE! The camp is RIPPED BY EXPLOSIONS everywhere! An unending, massive assault of HELLFIRE! As if every mortar and cannon in the world were shelling this one spot! The night is lit like daytime with the pluming, bursting EXPLOSIONS!

425 INT. BUNKER 425

Dust and debris rain down from the roof! The bunker is shaking, vibrating with the ROLLING THUNDER OF THE BLASTS! Now large chunks of roof are dislodged.

And then, slowly, it stops again -- The BLASTS taper off. Then just machine gun FIRE.

Then silence.

426 EXT. FORT APACHE 426

It's quiet again. The barrage has stopped. Except now the camp looks like the surface of the moon -- Huge smouldering craters are everywhere.

427 INT. BUNKER 427

Slowly the Green Berets get to their feet, move back to their machine gun positions. Robert gets up. Moves to the peephole. Looks out --

428 ROBERT'S POV 428

looking down, the no-man's land -- Quiet. Smoke. Nothing moves in the trees beyond.

429 POV 429

The concertina wire. Foliage.

430 POV 430

The other end of camp. The little clearing. Empty.

431 ROBERT 431

stares --

CUT TO:

432 EXT. HUEY CITY - NIGHT (RAIN) 432

Rain pours down on the silent Hueys.

433 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - NIGHT 433

Jeff sits in the cockpit. Smoking. Rain PELTS against the windows. There is a leak up above and rainwater drips down. Jeff glances at his wrist watch.

434 CLOSE - WRIST WATCH 434

It is 3:45.

435 JEFF 435

looks up at the rain --

CUT TO:

436 EXT. FORT APACHE - NIGHT 436

It's still quiet.

437 INT. BUNKER - NIGHT 437

Robert sits with his back against the wall. Waiting.

A GREEN BERET comes over, carrying a two-way radio. He squats down next to Robert.

GREEN BERET RADIOMAN
Someone callin' you -- From the Golf Course --

Robert takes the mike --

ROBERT
(into mike)
Orange Four, over --

438 INT. OPERATIONS TENT - NIGHT (RAIN) 438

Jeff is talking into the two-way at the Golf Course. Fields and some of the other men listen in the background. Jeff and Robert are more formal and superficial with each other because of the men listening to their conversation. INTERCUT the conversation --

JEFF
That you, Maze? Over --

ROBERT
(a grin)
I think so. Over --

JEFF
So what's happening out there? Over --

ROBERT
Well, the beer just arrived and we got some hot dogs cooking. Over --

JEFF
We're only twenty minutes away, when the weather clears. Save some for us, will you? Over --

ROBERT
We'd sure appreciate a visit.
(beat)
Look, the girls just got here, so I'd better go. Over --

Jeff wants to say something more. He glances at the men listening in the background.

JEFF
Okay -- Just, ah, hang in there now -- Over --

ROBERT
Orange Four, over, out --

Jeff turns away from the two-way, stares out at the rain.

439 ROBERT 439

hands the mike back to the Green Beret radioman and he scurries off. Silence. Robert glances over --

440 GREEN BERET MACHINE GUNNER 440

Slumped over his machine gun. Looking out the peephole. A cold, impassive expression -- which now changes. Into a kind of grin.

GREEN BERET
Hey -- Papa-san --

441 ROBERT 441

gets to his feet, looks out the peephole --

442 ROBERT'S POV 442

looking down. SEE figures moving in the trees. Scurrying, barely visible in the darkness --

443 POV 443

The concertina wire. More figures moving, ghostly shapes dressed in what looks like black pajamas, massing in the foliage --

444 POV 444

In the clear, more and more figures running through the clearing. They keep coming, twenty, thirty of them --

445 ROBERT 445

looks terrified -- There's so many of them --

Suddenly they are hit -- another barrage of machine gun FIRE and MORTAR BLASTS!

446 EXT. FORT APACHE 446

EXPLODING! Now tracers come streaming in!

447 ROBERT'S POV 447

looking down. A full-scale assault! The figures charge out of the treeline! They throw themselves onto the concertina wire! Others crawl over, rushing up the hill!

448 POV 448

A throng races out of the foliage, through the concertina wire!

449 POV 449

From the trees, through the clearing they come! Up the hill to the wire!

450 INT. BUNKER 450

The Green Berets on the machine guns OPEN FIRE!

451 ROBERT 451

winces from the SCREAMING SHRIEK of the machine guns --

CUT TO:

452 CLOSE ON WRIST WATCH 452

It's now 4:30.

453 EXT. HUEY CITY - NIGHT (FOG) 453

Jeff stands outside Chickenhawk, checking his watch. The rain has let up -- only a drizzle now, but there's fog all around Huey City. A thick mist covers the area. Flashlight beams spin eerily through the fog. Curtis, Crew and other pilots and crew gather around. Fields walks over -- Jeff glances up --

JEFF
Probably only five or six hundred feet deep --

FIELDS
Can't go till it burns off --

Jeff looks at Fields.

FIELDS
You can't go, McDonald -- I'm not going to lose anybody in the goddamn fog --

454 INT. FORT APACHE BUNKER - NIGHT 454

The battle rages! Machine guns CLATTER madly! Robert looks out through the peephole --

455 POV 455

looking down. The wave of VC pours up the hill, through EXPLOSIONS and GUNFIRE and smoke, inexorable, unstoppable!

456 ROBERT 456

suddenly turns from the peephole --

457 ROBERT'S POV 457

as further down the bunker, HEAR SHOUTS and SCREAMS! VC push their way through the machine gun ports, clawing the sandbags out of the way, climbing through, down into the bunker!

458 CLOSER 458

Through the smoke, SEE figures fighting hand-to-hand! FLASHES of GUNFIRE! SCREAMS, SHOUTS! It is an abstract image -- like some ancient, Stone Age cave battle --

459 ROBERT 459

spins around, and CAMERA MOVES IN to the peephole, as hands reach in, begin to claw away frantically at the sandbags!

460 WIDE SHOT 460

as Robert and his crew fall back, dash up a tunnel to the outside -- Green Berets follow --

461 EXT. FORT APACHE - DAWN 461

Smoky-blue half-light. CAMERA MOVES WITH Robert and his crew as they run from the bunker, scrambling across the camp toward a row of sandbags -- a second line perimeter. Green Berets, FIRING as they run, fall back --

462 EXT. HUEY CITY - DAWN 462

Still covered with fog. Chickenhawk and a couple other ships are turning, fired-up, ready to go --

463 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 463

Jeff and Deeth, staring out at the fog, waiting --

DEETH
It ain't gonna burn off -- We'd better shut down.

JEFF
I'm telling you -- there's a blue sky -- three, four hundred feet up --

Jeff stares out at the mist, then CLICKS his mike --

JEFF
(into mike)
Anybody wants to, get off now!

Deeth looks at him.

JEFF
Hurry up!

464 INT. REAR COMPARTMENT 464

Curtis, Crew, Jones -- They don't move. Then Jones jumps out of the ship --

465 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 465

Jeff glances at Deeth. Deeth unplugs his radio cord from his helmet, scrambles out of Chickenhawk. Then Jeff pulls up on the collective --

466 LOW ANGLE 466

as Chickenhawk's skids rise up, leaving the ground, disappearing up into the fog. SEE Fields, Deeth, Jones and the others watching in the background.

467 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 467

White nothingness extends in all directions. There is no sensation of movement. Jeff scans his instruments.

468 CLOSE ON ARTIFICIAL HORIZON GAUGE 468

showing Chickenhawk to be level --

469 JEFF 469

tense, staring out at the white --

JEFF
Come on --

470 INT. REAR COMPARTMENT 470

Curtis and Crew, looking out the open doors at the solid wall of fog --

471 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 471

The whiteness outside grows brighter. It blazes, becomes bluish, and then SEE a dark-green peak out there!

472 JEFF 472

JEFF
Yeah!

473 INT. REAR COMPARTMENT 473

as Curtis and Crew CHEER --

474 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 474

as the fog fades, and Chickenhawk breaks through on a clear, dark-blue morning.

CUT TO:

475 EXT. FORT APACHE - DAY 475

Amid an unceasing barrage of GUNFIRE and MORTARS, Robert, his crew, and about 12 Green Berets pull back to the helicopter landing area. They dive behind a last ring of sandbags.

Robert grabs his gunner --

(CONTINUED)

475 CONTINUED: 475

ROBERT
Help me get that goddamn gun from the ship!

They race over to Ace of Spades, now riddled with bullets, chunks of metal flying off. They unhook the M-60 machine gun from its mountings and drag it over to the sandbags.

476 POV FROM SANDBAGS - LONG LENS 476

The wave of Viet Cong rises up over the far edge of camp, like a wave surging over the edge of a dock. They crawl over the sandbags and bunkers, racing now across the camp.

477 ROBERT 477

and his gunner plop the M-60 over the top of the sandbags. The gunner feeds in belts of ammunition as Robert opens FIRE! His entire body is racked with a slamming, ROARING force!

478 POV - LONG LENS 478

The barrel of Robert's M-60 BLAZES. Through the smoke, SEE more and more VC, running, scrambling, crawling shapes, coming closer and closer, wave after wave -- Unstoppable --

479 LONG LENS - THE LAST STAND 479

Green Berets FIRING. Two are hit. Ten left. Robert hammers away with the M-60. His gunner is hit and flops down behind the sandbags. But Robert keeps FIRING alone. Smoke billows out around him. It's like he's fused with the machine gun. Smoke almost obscures the desperate figures fighting, silhouettes against the sky.

And then a dot appears in the sky in the distance. It moves down, lower -- SEE the whirling rotors -- It is Chickenhawk!

480 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 480

of Fort Apache, of the small encirclement of Green Berets near Ace of Spades, of the army of VC streaming toward them!

481 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 481

as Jeff drops pitch -- The ship rapidly descends --

482 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 482

dives down out of the sky --

483 EXT. LAST STAND 483

as Robert turns, sees Chickenhawk, SCREAMS to the others around him --

ROBERT
Get back, get back!

They see Chickenhawk now, and pull back from the sandbags, running now, still FIRING --

484 CHICKENHAWK 484

as it swoops low, streaking across the ground at about ten feet --

485 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 485

looking out the front, moving toward Robert and the other men, the army of VC coming up right behind them --

486 ROBERT 486

SCREAMING --

ROBERT
Down! Get down!

As the men hit the ground --

487 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 487

as Curtis opens FIRE on one side, CREW on the other --

488 CYCLIC 488

as Jeff's thumb hits the red button --

489 CHICKENHAWK 489

as the rocket tubes on the skids ROAR --

490 VIET CONG 490

as the ground around them EXPLODES UPWARD! Like a fountain of napalm!

491 CHICKENHAWK 491

drops lower, slows, the skids touching the ground, sliding --

492 REVERSE ANGLE - CHICKENHAWK ENTERS 492

FRAME and slides to a stop, as Robert and the Green Berets scramble off the ground toward the ship --

493 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 493

as Green Berets climb in -- Two more are hit! The crew from Ace of Spades jumps in. Curtis is hit! He slides down the bulkhead by his machine gun, his snapshots spilling out of his pocket on to the deck --

494 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 494

as Robert opens the door, starts in, is hit three times in the back and arms! His face contorts in pain! Jeff reaches over --

495 CLOSE - ROBERT'S HAND 495

as Jeff's hand grabs it, pulls him in --

496 ROBERT 496

flops in the seat, his face racked with pain --

497 JEFF 497

pulls in power --

498 CLOSE - ROTOR R.P.M. GAUGE 498

The needle's at 100% plus. Full power.

499 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 499

shuddering, trying to get off the ground --

500 INT. REAR COMPARTMENT 500

The ship shakes violently. There more than a full load of people in the back. Crew holds Curtis --

CREW
She's overloaded!

501 VIET CONG 501

moving again, through the smoke, charging toward the ship!

502 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 502

The ship trembles. Jeff moves his feet --

503 JEFF'S PEDALS 503

as he jams in left pedal, all the way --

504 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 504

as the ship rotates, turns around 180° on the ground, pushed by the tail rotor force --

505 CYCLIC 505

as Jeff inches it forward --

506 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 506

as it begins sliding across the ground, skids bumping along, slowly at first, now picking up speed --

507 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 507

The ship lurches and jumps and SLAMS! Robert is bounced around --

508 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 508

moving faster now -- Faster --

509 LOW ANGLE ON SKIDS 509

as the skids rise up, an inch off the ground -- then two inches -- then a foot --

510 FULL SHOT - CHICKENHAWK 510

as it lifts -- five feet -- climbing --

511 POV - BEHIND CHICKENHAWK 511

pulling away from the charging VC --

512 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 512

of the treeline ahead, coming closer and closer --

513 INT. CHICKENHAWK REAR COMPARTMENT 513

as Crew leans out the door --

CREW
We're not gonna make it over!

514 ROBERT 514

barely conscious, staring --

515 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 515

climbing slowly higher and higher --

516 JEFF 516

staring --

JEFF
Come on --

517 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 517

moving right toward the treeline, fifteen feet from the top -- ten -- eight -- five --

518 EXT. TOP OF TREELINE 518

as Chickenhawk wobbles over, the right skid catching on a treetop -- A HORRIBLE CRACKING SOUND, and the right skid is ripped off from its front mounting, hanging half off the ship!

519 POV THRU CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 519

as the ship humps over the treeline, a beautiful, blue sky out in front --

520 POV BEHIND CHICKENHAWK 520

as Fort Apache becomes a small, smoking dot in the middle of a vast, lush-green jungle -- HOLD on the SHOT, then --

CUT TO:

521 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - DAY 521

Jeff flies. Robert's head bobs slowly back and forth, listlessly, his mouth open, blood dripping out down his chin --

JEFF
You gotta hold on, now --

ROBERT
Man -- I'm tired --

JEFF
Come on, Maze --

ROBERT
I'm so fuckin' tired --

JEFF
Look -- I think we've burned off enough fuel -- We may be light enough to hover -- Just barely --

522 EXT. HUEY CITY - DAY 522

As Fields and the others look up --

523 CHICKENHAWK 523

makes a gentle approach --

524 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT. 524

JEFF
Okay, here we go --

ROBERT
I felt the -- right skid break --

JEFF
Yeah, I felt it too -- when we went over the trees --

525 EXT. HUEY CITY 525

as Chickenhawk comes in, lower and lower, into a hover five feet above the ground --

526 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - JEFF 526

pulls in all the power he's got --

JEFF
It's taking all we have to hover!

527 CLOSE - ROTOR R.P.M. GAUGE 527

100% plus power --

528 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 528

in a trembling hover --

529 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - JEFF 529

JEFF
(into mike)
All right, everybody jump off!

530 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 530

as the Green Berets, Ace of Spades crew jump down out of the rear compartment. Ground crews rush to help them. Crew gently lowers Curtis into someone's arms -- Then Crew quickly collects Curtis' snapshots from the deck and jumps off --

531 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 531

JEFF
(into mike)
Somebody get Maze out of here!

532 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 532

as a couple pilots rush to the cockpit, open the door --

533 ROBERT 533

is gently lifted from his seat, pulled out --

534 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT - JEFF 534

JEFF
(into mike)
Now everybody get back, I'm going to try to set her down!

535 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 535

as everyone moves back. Chickenhawk slowly descends toward the ground --

536 CLOSE - RIGHT SKID 536

as it touches the ground, CRACKING, buckling under!

537 FIELDS 537

at a two-way --

FIELDS
(into radio)
The skid's broken! You can't land, you'll roll over!

538 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 538

lifts back up off the ground, hovers for a moment, then noses over and takes off again --

539 EXT. HUEY CITY 539

as Chickenhawk disappears over the treeline --

540 EXT. STREAM - DAY 540

A stream runs by an open field. It is away from camp. SEE Chickenhawk swoop down, flare, hover just over the stream.

541 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 541

Jeff, all alone now, holds her in a hover --

JEFF
All right, baby -- Now that we're alone, and we can't hurt anybody --

Jeff slowly drops the collective --

542 CLOSE ON RIGHT SKID 542

as it touches the ground by the edge of the stream --

543 JEFF 543

JEFF
Now don't be too rough --

And he lowers the collective all the way down --

544 WIDE SHOT - CHICKENHAWK (MODEL) 544

as the ship sets down, the right skid collapses and the ship begins to roll over on its right side!

545 INT. CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 545

as it rolls over, Jeff holds on --

546 WIDE SHOT - CHICKENHAWK (MODEL) 546

as the blades hit the ground, Chickenhawk goes wild! The fuselage jumps and twists in a GRINDING, palsied fury! Smoke and debris fly! The blades SNAP off -- !

547 FROM BEHIND JEFF - CHICKENHAWK COCKPIT 547

looking out the front, SEE the blades SMASH through the windshield!

548 JEFF 548

splattered with glass, a piece of metal debris protrudes from the fleshy part of his left bicep. Blood pours.

549 CHICKENHAWK (MODEL) 549

sliding, jumping, undulating on the ground in a mad fury!

550 WIDE ON JEFF - LOOKING BACK (BLUE SCREEN) 550

Looking back into the rear compartment, as the rear compartment EXPLODES into flames, the engine GRINDING into the gas tank! Fire billows toward CAMERA, engulfing Jeff!

551 WIDE SHOT - CHICKENHAWK (MODEL) 551

as the mid-section of the ship EXPLODES, as the ship still beats itself to death on the ground!

552 JEFF - LONG LENS 552

in the flames, clawing at his seat belt --

553 CLOSE ON SEAT BELT BUCKLE 553

as his hand tries to unsnap it -- The sleeve of Jeff's arm is on fire!

554 CLOSE ON JEFF'S FACE - LONG LENS 554

fire licking around him, he SCREAMS!

555 SEAT BELT BUCKLE 555

as it finally comes free --

556 JEFF - LONG LENS 556

burning, reaching up for the door above him --

557 DOOR HANDLE 557

as Jeff's burning arm stretches for it, his hand grasping the handle --

558 EXT. CHICKENHAWK 558

as Jeff pulls himself up, out of the door. He is on fire! Using his good arm, he pulls himself up on top of the fuselage and leaps from the still-crawling ship --

559 WIDE SHOT - STREAM 559

as Jeff plunges into the water, rolls around, putting out the fire on his body --

560 CHICKENHAWK (MODEL) 560

as the ship BLOWS UP in a hard, concussive SLAM!

561 JEFF 561

drags himself to the opposite shore. His legs and arms are smouldering, blackened -- His head is bloody -- His left arm hangs limply -- He turns, looks back --

562 CLOSE ON DECAL 562

'Chickenhawk'. The painting of the coward/hero, ferocious/scared bird -- Consumed by fire, the paint peeling, curling, blackening --

CUT TO:

563 INT. MEDIVAC HELICOPTER - REAR COMPARTMENT - DAY 563

Robert is strapped in on a stretcher. A MEDIC kneels over him. There are IVs in Robert's arms. Through the open rear door, SEE the Golf Course hospital, and as the ship rises, SEE the hospital slide down out of sight. Robert is awake, his eyes half-open. Outside, the jungle drifts away --

564 EDGE OF CAMP - LONG LENS 564

A LONG LENS compresses the shot, as Jeff staggers out of the trees, bloody, blackened, burned, his arm limp -- Painfully he shuffles along -- He looks up, at the SOUND of the Medivac helicopter --

565 JEFF'S POV 565

The Medivac helicopter carrying Robert is now a small dot in the blue sky --

566 LONG-LENS SHOT - JEFF 566

stands staring -- Now people see Jeff, and start running to him, but before they can get to him he kneels over and collapses on the ground, unconscious --

CUT TO:

567 EXT. BEACH AND OCEAN - DAY 567

A beautiful, picture-postcard expanse of beach and ocean. Palm trees. Eggshell-blue sky. Robert sits in a beach chair, his arm in a sling, still bandaged up, still a little shaky. He stares out at the rolling waves --

568 EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY 568

Still wearing a sling, Robert steps away from a large military transport plane. He is in full-dress uniform, the Purple Heart and several Distinguished Flying Cross medals pinned to his chest. He salutes SEVERAL OFFICERS who salute back. But as Robert walks away, through a gate, he looks around -- There are no cheering crowds, no banners, no brass bands -- Just an empty airfield --

569 INT. MILITARY HOSPITAL - BURN WARD - DAY 569

Jeff is in bed -- In incredible pain -- Beyond him is a row of other BURNED VETS in their beds --

570 INT. AIRPORT GIFT SHOP - DAY 570

Months later. Jeff, in full-dress uniform, looking better, steps to the counter of an airport gift shop. He, too, has an array of medals on his chest. Including the Purple Heart. His left arm hangs limply at his side.

Jeff plops down some money for a magazine. The CLERK, a well-dressed woman in her forties, stares at him.

CLERK
Are you just coming back from Vietnam?

(CONTINUED)

570 CONTINUED: 570

JEFF
Yes.

CLERK
(glares)
Murderer.

Jeff stares at her, for a long beat --

571 TV SCREEN - MONTAGE 571

As we SEE the years go by, a montage of visual sequences and SOUNDS --

Anti-war demonstrators in the streets -- marching, burning draft cards -- A FLASH of static, then --

The Chicago Democratic Convention late in 1968 -- Police and young protesters battle in the streets -- FLASH of static --

News footage of Jane Fonda conferring with the North Vietnamese -- FLASH of static --

Shots of the fall of Saigon in 1975 -- The North Vietnamese Army, finally emerging from the foliage, marches into the city -- Helicopters airlift desperate South Vietnamese -- Aircraft carriers with refugees aboard -- South Vietnamese pilots ditch their helicopters in the sea --

FLASHES of static -- SEE brief glimpses of commercials, football games, sit-coms -- as the country forgets about Vietnam -- A FLASH, and --

CUT TO:

572 INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 572

JULIE, Jeff's wife, is asleep, but Jeff isn't. His eyes burn in the darkness. Slowly, he rises up out of bed, looking like a man possessed. He has a gun, a .45 revolver in his hand -- he's been sleeping with it. Slowly, stealthily, Jeff moves across the room.

573 ANGLE FROM BEHIND JEFF 573

CAMERA MOVES BEHIND Jeff, MOVES WITH him as he creeps up to the closet door. He slowly opens it, and CAMERA MOVES IN CLOSER, OVER HIS SHOULDER to SEE, not the inside of a closet, but <u>EXPLOSIONS erupting in a vast darkness.</u> Through the threshold of the door <u>it's Vietnam out there!</u> CAMERA MOVES DOWN now, and SEE <u>a helicopter</u> drop down, lit by the explosions, hovering a few feet off the ground, rotors ROARING. It is <u>Chickenhawk!</u>

574 JULIE 574

sits up in bed, looks at Jeff --

JULIE
Jeff?

575 ANGLE FROM BEHIND JEFF 575

as he turns to look at Julie, with a curious, puzzled, confused expression. And now SEE that it is just a closet on the other side of the door --

576 INT. ROBERT'S LIVING ROOM - DAY 576

Robert looks much older. He sits in a chair, watching TV. There's something weathered and sad about his face.

577 TV SCREEN 577

Now SEE footage of the freed American embassy hostages from Iran getting off the airplane -- A ticker-tape parade in New York City for the freed hostages. It is 1980. Smiles and cheers from the crowd -- A hero's welcome --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And it's an incredible hero's welcome from the city of New York, and from the entire country, to the freed American hostages from Iran -- Their ordeal is finally over --

578 ROBERT 578

now his face turns deeply, bitterly angry.

ROBERT
Bullshit!

DISSOLVE TO:

579 EXT. JEFF'S DESERT SHACK - DAY 579

A small, dilapidated little house in the middle of the Mohave Desert. A wind blows dust around. A car pulls up in front. Robert gets out. Looking much older now. He walks through the broken front gate, up the walk toward the front door. Then Robert stops. Looks.

580 JEFF 580

walks slowly around the side of the house. He has long hair and a beard. He carries a .45 semi-automatic in his hand and looks at Robert. His left arm is still useless, dead --

581 JEFF AND ROBERT 581

look at each other, after all the years --

ROBERT
Been lookin' for you --

Jeff says nothing.

ROBERT
You never answered any of my letters --
I tried to get a hold of you --
(beat)
What are you doing out here?

JEFF
Gettin' by --

ROBERT
I talked to your wife. She told me
you moved out here six months ago --

JEFF
Look -- you gotta go now --

ROBERT
I want you to come back with me.
There's a meeting of the old Air
Cav -- at some high school in L.A.
The pilots are getting back together
again, to talk about it, to do some-
thing about it --

JEFF
Do what?

ROBERT
I don't know yet -- But I'm not
going to hide anymore --

JEFF
Well, good for you --

ROBERT
Those embassy hostages were over there
working 9 to 5 -- They didn't stick
their asses out, they didn't fight --
and they get treated like heroes --

JEFF
What do you want, more fuckin' medals?

ROBERT
Coming back from Vietnam is like
farting at the dinner table. Everybody
looks away and acts like nothing happened.
Well, pardon me -- but something happened!

(CONTINUED)

581 CONTINUED 581

Jeff breaks into a little half-smile --

JEFF
Christ, Maze -- You're still talkin' the same old shit -- When are you gonna get it? Things are the way they are -- We lost, man. That's what the world thinks --

ROBERT
I know.

JEFF
And the world hates a loser --
(beat)
So just leave me alone --

Jeff turns and walks to the front door of the little desert house. He opens it and steps inside. Robert follows --

582 INT. JEFF'S DESERT SHACK - DAY 582

Robert steps through the door, looks around --

Like the Man Without a Country, Jeff has created his own world inside the shack, his own Vietnam memorial: a map of Vietnam hangs on one wall, Jeff's medals on another. Life Magazine photos are pinned up: a white Marine gives mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to a wounded black comrade, a Huey looms out of the smoke of battle. On another wall are Curtis' snapshots -- SEE Robert's picture, Jeff's, the pilots from the Golf Course, standing by their machines, arms around each other, posing for Curtis. Underneath the snapshots, hand-written, is a sign: 'To Those Left Behind By An Ungrateful Country'. All by itself on one wall is a large American flag --

Jeff stands with his back to Robert --

JEFF
In here -- we won -- You show me something better --
(beat)
I'm stayin' here --

Robert sees an Air Cav playing card pinned to the wall. He goes over to it. It is the one he left for Jeff that first night. 'The spade ace is here' is inscribed. Robert pulls out the pin, reads from the card:

ROBERT
'One fine day we will all stand together -- and together mount our thundering steeds -- for on that day we shall finally know --'
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

582 CONTINUED: 582

ROBERT (CONT'D)
'of life and death, of heartless deeds --
we will know of ourselves, each and
every one ...'

Robert looks up at Jeff. No response. Jeff is motionless, his back to Robert. Robert stares at him for several beats.

ROBERT
Right.

He pins the playing card back up on the wall, then turns and walks out of the shack --

583 EXT. JEFF'S DESERT SHACK 583

Robert moves toward his car. After a beat Jeff appears at the door, staring after his friend --

JEFF
Fly together into the sun, huh?

Robert turns around. Their eyes meet.

ROBERT
Yeah.

Jeff steps down to the front walk --

JEFF
Well, maybe a meeting like that won't
be so damn bad after all --

ROBERT
That's what I thought --

JEFF
Maybe they'd even elect me president
of the whole thing --

ROBERT
(smiles)
I figure they'll elect me --

JEFF
Six-pack says they don't --

Now they both smile. And then Robert moves to Jeff, and embraces him, holds him tightly, arms around him, trying to form a barrier around Jeff that nothing can penetrate. Now both men hold each other, holding on tightly for their lives, as the desert dust swirls around them.

(CONTINUED)

583 CONTINUED: 583

Now HEAR the music from "FORT APACHE" ('Scottish Dance') as they finally look at each other, tears in their eyes --

FADE OUT.

ROLL END CREDITS.

THE END